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ABSTRACT

This paper evaluates the impact on student achievement made by eight New York City alternative high schools. The schools serve students with histories of poor attendance and low academic achievement, so an emphasis is placed, in the first section of this report, on findings which reveal students' credit accumulation and attendance patterns in their first semester. Comparisons are drawn between students' performances at their earlier schools and at the alternative schools, and among the different alternative schools themselves; improved student achievement at most of the alternative schools is reported. To verify this finding and to define the characteristics of successful alternatives, the report's second section provides case studies of three successful schools. A school-by-school profile is followed by a discussion of student and teacher satisfaction, school organization and programs, and effective school climates. Finally, general recommendations, addressed mainly to policy makers, are given. Appendices contain student population data from all eight alternative schools and research instruments.
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Lessons From Alternative High Schools

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A report of the PUBLIC EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

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Towards School Improvement:

Lessons From Alternative High Schools

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and Susan B. McConnaughy, Research Associate**

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This study is a result of the contributions of many individuals. We especially appreciate the openness and cooperation of the nine alternative school principals who welcomed us to their schools and provided access to their students and staff. We owe special thanks to Hal Genkin, Principal of Pacific High School, for introducing us to the principals and advising us on the "human relations" at each stage of the process.

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SUMMARY

The Public Education Association initiated this study to learn what alternative schools have to teach about the education of truants, dropouts, and potential dropouts -- youths who collectively compose half of New York City's high school age population. Just as important, we wanted to learn the lessons these schools could provide for general school reform.

The eight alternative high schools studied serve mostly students with records of poor attendance and underachievement in academics, but students' reading levels, previous degree of discipline problems, and history of truancy and dropping out vary substantially.

In a preliminary assessment of performance, we compared Fall 1981 credit accumulation and attendance data for 25 percent of incoming students at eight alternative schools with similar data from their earlier high school careers. On average, this group of nearly 300 students earned 60 percent more credits and cut their absences by nearly 40 percent -- clearly an important break from past patterns. Nonetheless, older students with severe academic deficits and few credits were earning credits at rates which cast doubt on their prospects for graduation.

The study's quantitative findings are, at best, only indicators of achievement, but significantly, when attendance improved, so did credit accumulation. This correlation suggests credits were awarded for genuine effort and learning. Moreover, the study's qualitative findings in three schools selected for intensive study -- High School Redirection, City-As-School and Satellite Academy High School for Career Education -- confirmed this assumption.

These three schools were chosen for in-depth study for two reasons. Together they provided a broad cross section of student populations ranging from older, often illiterate dropouts who required remedial instruction (High School Redirection) to able, but previously underachieving students who could be challenged by internships outside of school (City-As-School). Satellite Academy entrants, reading at about the ninth grade level, fell somewhere between the two extremes. Each,

moreover, had significantly improved students' attendance and credit accumulation ($p < .01$).

Together with extensive observations of classes, staff meetings and other aspects of school life, researchers interviewed 15 to 20 students and at least half the staff members at each of these three schools.

Repeatedly, students expressed real satisfaction about their relationships with teachers; about the safe, nonviolent and caring atmosphere of their schools; and about the educational programs, which they perceived as well suited to their needs and interests.

When asked, "Why did you leave your former school?", students in the three schools most frequently cited the former school's unsatisfactory climate. More specifically, they mentioned fear of gangs and violence, poor relationships with teachers, a sense of the school as too big and overwhelming and, for some, the school being too confining.

An overwhelming 96 percent of the students said they decided to enroll in an alternative school to "get that piece of paper," a high school diploma. Their chance of achieving that goal, they said, was enhanced by the caring atmosphere and more suitable educational program at the alternative school.

Teachers shared students' satisfaction with the alternative school setting and confirmed students' views that the climate in the schools and the carefully developed educational programs together accounted for the difference in student performance.

Observations and interviews suggest specific factors which account for the success of the three case study schools. At the heart of the matter is the interrelationship between climate and academic programming -- a relationship, at least in the three case study schools, which rebuts the concerns that the alternative schools, as a group, sacrifice academics for "good vibes."

The strengths of the schools are their well-focused academic programs and their capacity to engage students and teachers in a dialogue that reaches beyond the formality and rigidity of roles into the reality of individual lives; in other words, to foster creative human relationships.

In the best schools, these relationships are not set apart nor simply allowed to dangle alongside the instructional and organizational features of the school. They inform the curriculum and structure of the school and clear the way for teaching and learning, the goal toward which everything aims.

This matter of fostering exemplary teaching-learning relationships is the outgrowth of several features. First, these schools have well-defined student populations; they know what their students need and they program accordingly.

At the best, the schools have principals who are strong academic leaders. The principal works with faculty to ground curriculum in students' personal, social, and cultural histories, their intellectual needs, and the school system's subject matter requirements.

Teachers' roles are diversified to allow for increased managerial participation and for opportunities to counsel students. Counseling enhances teachers' sensitivity to students' needs while administrative authority increases the likelihood this understanding will result in better programming.

Partial course credit, fast paced cycles, and learning contracts enhance students' opportunities to succeed academically. "Wide awakesness" is encouraged by inviting students to participate in regular classroom discussions, to make decisions regarding the courses they will take, and to learn, where feasible, through doing.

A few commonly agreed upon, frequently discussed school rules establish clear standards for conduct, and a highly structured support system enables students to live within those rules.

Finally, small school size, the factor most principals and teachers saw as the sine qua non of their capacity to reach students who were formerly very hard to reach in school, encourages communication and a sense of belonging and limits the bureaucratic obstacles to leadership and programming.

When data from student and faculty interviews and the above observations were taken together, we began to glimpse what dropout and truant youngsters require of their schools: structure and support, close interpersonal relationships, flexibility, a curriculum that helps them understand the world and their own lives, and continuity toward a diploma.

Nonetheless, alternative schools suffer some deficits. All eight schools examined in this study emphasize career education and many place students in jobs, but they are only able to provide minimal on-site vocational training. It seems, at least in part, the schools have been overlooked as funds for training equipment become available.

The schools are also hampered by inadequate facilities and a lack of supplies and resources. Some are not properly painted; others lack important facilities such as gyms and lunchrooms. Too few books and insufficient supplies erode morale and hamper efforts to build superior courses and extra-curricular activities.

Despite these problems, the schools are clearly opening doors for teenagers who have previously felt excluded from classrooms.

This report suggests two important directions for Board of Education policies. The first regards dropout prevention and points toward smaller high schools. School system resistance to very small schools can be understood in terms of the objectives to create a democratizing mix of student populations and take advantage of economies of scale. However, both these needs can probably be met in moderate sized groupings. Moreover, large schools have been found to encourage violence and disruption (Ianni, 1979), the very matters students told us they dropped out to avoid. While particular principals in particular circumstances will, no doubt, be able to offset the negative aspect of large school size, work on student participation (Barker and Gump, 1964) and delinquency (Garbarino, 1978, 1980; Gottfredson and Darjer, 1979) favors secondary schools of about of 500-1200 students.

The second direction points toward comprehensive programming for dropout or high risk students with continuity toward the diploma. Though both the Outreach and Literacy Centers are highly commendable efforts by the school system to meet the needs of high risk students, our findings and the repeated statements of Outreach Center administrators suggest that students with extremely erratic attendance patterns and intense needs for responsive, reliable, non-threatening human relationships find difficulty transferring from a short term program to a school.

These programs are likely to be their last stop so they must be seamlessly integrated into schools and equivalency diploma preparation centers where the underlying path to the completion of high school or the diploma is clear and obtainable.

Though these findings point in a clear direction, further research and continued innovation are necessary to answer numerous questions raised by this investigation.

We have learned, for example, that students make significant gains in the short run in many alternative schools, but subsequent research is required to confirm that these gains hold over-time. In particular, we need to know whether the performance of older students with few credits improves substantially as they grow more conscious of the shortness of time they have to get a diploma, or the contrary. It would be equally important to discover the number and the profile of students the alternative schools do not reach and why. Above all we have become conscious of the need to answer questions about alternative schools in the context of the growing number of other available options.

Yet, enough has been documented by this study and studies by the Board of Education to move ahead immediately to incorporate current knowledge into educational programs. The pervasiveness of the problem suggests the system as a whole, not merely the High School Division, must respond. Among the study's recommendations are that:

- The Board of Education should develop a flexible policy on school size, rather than one which insists on consolidation. Small schools are not the recipe for improving public education, but they are a critical ingredient. Moderate size schools (500-1100 students) seem optimal.
- High school superintendents should develop borough-wide master plans to expand and coordinate offerings to students, especially the most "high risk" youth.
- Immediate resolution should be found for administrative and programmatic problems in buildings occupied by more than one school program, and long range solutions should consider the educational goals of differing programs when planning multiple uses for buildings.
- Staff members of the various alternative schools should be encouraged to meet periodically to share program and administrative methods.

- The Board of Education should work with the schools to develop realistic data collection and evaluation procedures to analyze the schools' effectiveness.
- For schools geared toward students with records of exceptionally low attendance, the Board of Education should work with the State to develop an alternative to the present re-registration standard requiring 90 percent student retention.
- Short term programs such as the Outreach and Literacy Centers should be closely tied to diploma-granting schools to avoid isolating young teenage students in unduly restrictive environments.
- The Board of Education should immediately fill the glaring gaps in financial and administrative support for alternative schools. The Office of Career Education should work with the schools to help them obtain Vocational Education Act funds so they can establish job preparation programs. The Other Than Personnel Services (OTPS) budget for high schools should be re-formulated by establishing a floor to the per capita allocations. Currently, small schools lack sufficient money to cover basic necessities such as copying machines and telephones. Finally, necessary resources should be provided to renovate and adapt abandoned sites assigned to these schools.
- The Board of Education and independent agencies should conduct further studies to clarify the effectiveness of approaches developed by alternative schools. These should include a longitudinal study of student performance beyond their first semester. Also, the full range of programs established for dropouts should be studied to determine how well they each serve the needs of a special student population and how coordination among them can be enhanced.
- The Board of Education should provide incentives to traditional high schools which would enable them to strengthen their academic programs and foster better student-teacher relationships.

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INTRODUCTION

The Public Education Association undertook this study of New York City's alternative high schools because the dropout rate of the City's youth continues to alarm us. The shift in employment opportunities away from blue-collar jobs aggravates the plight of an army of often illiterate, angry and disaffected adolescents who daily seek out the city's streets instead of its classrooms.

Chancellor Frank J. Macchiarola's increasing focus on "at risk" adolescents and high school reform in general also roused our interest in this study. As Harvard political scientist James Q. Wilson argues, successful policy analyses "involve statements about what has happened in the past... (and) evaluations of policies that have already been implemented." By examining the 1970's experiments with alternative schools, we sought to learn what they have to teach about the education of youth at the margin -- students who represent a full 50 percent of the high school age population. Just as important, we sought to learn what broad lessons, if any, alternative schools can provide for high school reform in the future.

Alternative schools and the student-centered philosophy they generally practice have been perceived as congenial to students, but suspected of sacrificing learning to climate. If the latter were true, they would have very few positive lessons for educators. Accordingly, our first task was to evaluate the impact of alternative schools on student achievement. Several statistical measures such as progress on standardized reading and mathematics tests were considered, but they had to be rejected because schools lacked comparative data. Two measures were finally adopted: credit accumulation and attendance. This information was obtained from first-semester records of more than a quarter of the students, selected at random, who enrolled in each of the alternative schools in the fall of 1981*. It was compared to data from their previous

* One of the alternative schools, Satellite Academy, is composed of four semi-autonomous academies. Throughout this report our discussion of Satellite is based on the Chambers Street Academy which is generally representative of the student population and program of the entire school.

semesters in high school. Our conclusions, though necessarily guarded because of the limited time span of the data, encouraged us to go on to the next step: an in-depth study of several alternative schools.

Initial interviews and observations were conducted to develop a context for the inquiry and identify the most promising schools for intensive examination. This early work revealed what one might expect: the schools differed not only in the student populations they served and in their perceptions of their mission, but also in their relative success in achieving the varying objectives. We would have liked to study all with equal care, but, in a compromise prompted by limited resources, we selected City-As-School, High School Redirection, and Satellite Academy for intensive study. They provided us with a broad range of educational approaches and student populations. Also, in our view, each of the three was effective for its particular student group. Our statistical analysis of student performance later confirmed that assumption although another school not studied in depth, Bronx Regional, performed equally well.

We interviewed at least fifteen students and half of the staff at each school and conducted extensive observations. We found that, despite their differences, the three schools shared key traits apparently crucial to their effectiveness. Much of this study describes the characteristics that help these schools reach students who have previously preferred to avoid school.

The study also examines problems within the alternative schools, ranging from a lack of central board support to dim prospects of graduation for many of the schools' students. To chart an intelligent course for reducing the city's acute adolescent dropout problem, these problems deserve as much attention as the school's accomplishments. Accordingly, this study suggests steps the alternative schools and the school system must take to enhance and better evaluate their performance. It also recommends steps to extend the best practices of alternative schools into other schools in time to make a difference for children.

Some facts about the alternative schools are useful in order to understand the findings. Most of the schools were established in the 1970's (some with private funds) to provide options for the many youths perceived to be alienated from traditional schools. The schools have remained small, out of the mainstream of the city high school system, and relatively unnoticed.

There were ten public alternative high schools when this study was designed: Bronx Regional High School, City-As-School (Manhattan), Harlem Preparatory High School (Manhattan), High School Redirection (Brooklyn), Lower East Side Preparatory High School (Manhattan), Middle College High School (Queens), Pacific High School (Brooklyn), Park East High School (Manhattan), Satellite Academy High School for Career Education (Bronx, Manhattan and Queens), and West Side High School (Manhattan). Harlem Prep closed early in the study, and many immigrant students at Lower East Side Prep lacked necessary records for comparison, so the overall study included only eight schools.

The schools studied serve mostly students with histories of poor attendance and low academic achievement that suggest they may not graduate from high school. Beyond that, similarities of the student populations diminish. Differences include age, male-female ratio, history of truancy, previous credit accumulation, reading ability and previous behavior problems. Among the schools studied in depth:

-- Satellite serves twice as many females as males, primarily truants and dropouts between the ages of 14 and 20. These students generally do not have serious disciplinary histories: only three percent of the study group had been suspended. The number of credits they arrive with varies from zero to nearly 30, but is generally below the average level, and most Satellite students are about one and a half years below their expected reading level.

-- In contrast, City-As-School students are evenly divided between sexes and are primarily transfers from other schools. They are in the same age range as Satellite students, have even fewer disciplinary entries on their records, and show a similar divergence in credit accumulation. They read very well -- often above their grade level.

-- Redirection students are generally older truants and dropouts. Almost one quarter of the entrants are over 18 and one out of six have had serious disciplinary problems. Half enter with no credits from their previous year of school but the range of credit accumulation is broad. Their median reading scores average more than three years below the expected level. This presents a serious problem not evident in the other two schools.

The remaining five schools also differ from each other. Older students with histories of disciplinary problems, truancy, dropping out and acute academic deficiencies attend Pacific and Bronx Regional, though Bronx Regional has twice as many males as females. West Side also serves many students with disciplinary histories, but they are both transfers and dropouts, with fewer academic problems. Park East's students are similar to those at Satellite, while Middle College is unusual in that it serves relatively young students, all admitted directly from junior high school (ninth grade). They read one year below their expected level. They are referred to Middle College by their junior high schools as students who might drop out based on behavior and attitude as well as previous school performance.

As Table I shows, the schools also vary in size and educational focus. The significance of these two elements is discussed later in this report.

TABLE I

PROFILE OF THE ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS BY
ENROLLMENT AND EDUCATIONAL FOCUS

<u>School</u>	<u>Enrollment*</u>	<u>Focus</u>
City-As-School	425	Ninety percent of student's academic work done through out-of-school internships.
Lower East Side Prep	512	ESL emphasis. Population largely Chinese immigrants but there is a smaller, non-Asian remedial group.
Park East	373	Currently more traditional in structure than other alternative schools. Focus on basics, career education and college preparation.
Satellite Academy	694 (divided among four separate academies)	Emphasis on student participation and faculty governance, basic skills and critical thinking.
West Side	314	Counseling orientation to help students overcome resistance to learning.
Bronx Regional	352	Non-coercive approach to behavior modification, emphasis on basic skills and social adjustment of students.
High School Redirection	534	Comprehensive services for older, often nonliterate dropouts.
Pacific High School	486	Comprehensive services for older, often nonliterate dropouts.
Middle College High School	457	High school instruction on college campus with mandatory out-of-school internships. Focus is dropout prevention.

Appendix A provides a thorough analysis of the student population in each school.

* As of October 31, 1981, "High School Profile," High School Division, Board of Education.

I. FIRST SEMESTER STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN EIGHT ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

To begin to study the outcomes of the alternative schools, students' performance during their first semester at eight of the alternative high schools (Fall 1981) was compared with their performance in their previous high schools.* Comparable records for the ninth school, Lower East Side Prep, were not available because of the high percentage of recent Chinese immigrants. Two quantitative measures were used: credit accumulation and absence rate. These measures do not assess any qualitative outcomes of the alternative schools, but they are basic standards for assessing school effectiveness. (See Section I-D, p. 15, for an explanation of Attendance and Credit Accumulation.)

The study used two different measures of prior credit accumulation. The total credits each student earned during the last year in high school were divided by two to determine the average number of credits for each semester. This tells us about the student's most recent, and probably most difficult year in school. Secondly, each student's rate of accumulation was computed by dividing the total number of high school credits earned by the total number of semesters in attendance to determine the average number of credits per semester. This provides information about the student's overall high school career.

For all comparisons, a t-test was used to evaluate the statistical significance of any observed differences between the alternative schools and previous schools. The t-test is a measure of the difference between the two groups. In this report we consider differences to be statistically significant if they could be due to chance less than five times out of 100 ($p < .05$).

* In each of the three case study schools approximately 50 percent of the students who entered in Fall 1981 were sampled by selecting every other name from a roster. If a selected student did not have a complete record card on file, the next student with available information was included in the sample. In the other five schools, approximately 25 percent of the Fall 1981 entrants were sampled using the same procedure.

A. CREDIT ACCUMULATION DATA

1. Comparison with Credits Earned During the Last Year in High School

Table II.

During the Fall 1981 semester, students in all but one of the eight alternative high schools earned more credits than they averaged for each semester of the previous high school year. The positive effect was significant in five of the schools, though in some of these schools, students were still earning credits at a very slow rate. Differences among the alternative schools in average number of credits students earned during the fall seem roughly related to differences in populations the schools serve. At schools where many students have academic deficits and/or histories of disciplinary actions, students earn relatively fewer credits.

Middle College is the one exception to these general findings. Students there earn fewer credits than they did in ninth grade, but they were earning close to the standard number of credits* during their previous year, and the decline was not substantial.

* Students must earn five credits per semester in order to accumulate the 40 credits necessary for graduation in four years of high school.

TABLE II

CREDITS EARNED DURING ONE SEMESTER AT THE ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL COMPARED WITH
THE AVERAGE NUMBER OF CREDITS EARNED EACH SEMESTER OF THE PREVIOUS SCHOOL YEAR

<u>Case Study Schools</u>	<u>Previous School</u>	<u>Alternative School</u>	<u>t</u>
CITY-AS-SCHOOL (n=86)	3.10	4.72	4.56**
REDIRECTION (n=44)	0.72	2.59	6.73**
SATELLITE (n=27)	2.12	6.44	7.14**
<u>Other Schools</u>			
BRONX REGIONAL (n=17)	1.02	2.91	4.95**
MIDDLE COLLEGE (n=38)	4.89	4.13	-2.30*
PACIFIC (n=26)	1.61	2.44	1.86**
PARK EAST (n=26)	2.21	3.61	2.90**
WEST SIDE ¹ (n=33)	2.33	2.68	0.88

¹Does not include eighth grade transfers.

* p < .05
** p < .01

2. Comparison with Rate of Credit
Accumulation

Table III.

When comparing the average number of credits earned each semester throughout a high school career, students in seven of the alternative schools were still earning more credits than in their previous schools. In four of the schools the difference was significant.

Middle College was again an exception to general findings. Students there transferred from ninth grade, so their overall high school careers were equivalent to their last year in junior high school. In ninth grade they were earning close to the standard of five credits per semester. The level dropped closer to four credits at Middle College.

TABLE III

RATE OF CREDIT ACCUMULATION IN THE ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL
COMPARED WITH THE PREVIOUS RATE OF CREDIT ACCUMULATION

<u>Case Study Schools</u>	<u>Previous School</u>	<u>Alternative School</u>	<u>t</u>
CITY-AS-SCHOOL (n=82)	3.85	4.77	2.75**
REDIRECTION (n=44)	1.41	2.59	4.16**
SATELLITE (n=26)	2.85	6.44	6.17**
<u>Other Schools</u>			
BRONX REGIONAL (n=17)	1.53	2.91	2.63*
MIDDLE COLLEGE (n=38)	4.89	4.13	-2.30*
PACIFIC (n=26)	2.06	2.44	0.90
PARK EAST (n=26)	3.18	3.61	0.83
WEST SIDE ¹ (n=31)	2.76	2.77	0.02

¹Does not include eighth grade transfers.

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

B. ATTENDANCE DATA

Comparisons with Absences During the Last Year in High School

TABLE IV.

Results of this comparison show that in all but one of the alternative schools students' attendance improved -- and significantly in six schools. The one exception, again, is Middle College, where students had very low absence rates during the previous year.

TABLE IV

THE NUMBER OF DAYS ABSENT DURING THE FIRST SEMESTER IN THE ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL COMPARED WITH THE AVERAGE NUMBER OF DAYS ABSENT IN EACH SEMESTER OF THE PREVIOUS SCHOOL YEAR

<u>Case Study Schools</u>	<u>Previous School</u>	<u>Alternative School</u>	<u>t</u>
CITY-AS-SCHOOL (n=65)	26.15	13.57	4.05**
REDIRECTION (n=43)	40.10	29.51	3.03**
SATELLITE (n=25)	28.58	9.24	4.54**
<u>Other Schools</u>			
BRONX REGIONAL (n=17)	25.67	11.52	3.46**
MIDDLE COLLEGE (n=37)	9.44	11.43	-1.04
PACIFIC (n=26)	32.70	21.23	2.58*
PARK EAST (n=21)	33.93	27.24	1.20
WEST SIDE (n=40)	35.55	25.42	2.19*

*p < .05

**p < .01

C. IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

As the preceding section detailed, credit accumulation and attendance improved significantly in four of the eight alternative high schools studied and, in the other schools, with the exception of Middle College,* there was significant improvement on one of two measures. In interpreting these findings two caveats are warranted:

1. Grannis (1980) and others have found that fall attendance tends to be higher than spring (or the average of fall and spring).
2. The first semester in a new school may reflect novelty and Hawthorne effects.

These caveats have encouraged us to restrict our interpretation of the data to the assertion that the alternative schools enable under-achieving students to make significant breaks from their previous unconstructive attendance and/or achievement patterns, thereby making a positive contribution towards their education.

Despite the schools' significant accomplishments, it is sobering to note that in absolute terms, in certain cases, attendance and credit accumulation appear inadequate for sustained academic progress and graduation. Consider two of the alternative schools whose students performed at the median level relative to the other alternative schools: Bronx Regional and Park East High School. Students at Bronx Regional earned 2.91 credits in their first semester at the alternative school (Table II, Section A), and they had completed an average of 5.2 credits before entering the alternative school (Table D, Appendix A). At this rate it would take students approximately 12 semesters (six years) to complete their degrees. Since students averaged 16.4 years old before they entered Bronx Regional (Table A, Appendix A), half would be well over 21 and no longer eligible for the programs of the Board of Education before they completed their 40 credits. Even before then,

* Middle College students enter the school with adequate attendance and credit accumulation and generally maintain such. This is an accomplishment because, as previously noted, the students are referred to Middle College because they are felt to be at risk of dropping out in the transition to high school.

these older students would be vulnerable to the external forces which compete most strongly for the attention of young adults.

The picture is somewhat more hopeful for Park East students. At their new semester rate of credit accumulation, 3.61 credits (Table II, Section A), it would take the average student approximately nine semesters (4½ years) to complete a degree having earned an average of 6.6 credits previously (Table D, Appendix A). Park East students are an average of 15.9 years old (Table A, Appendix A) when they enter the school. This gives them slightly better odds of earning a diploma, but still puts them at considerable risk.

An examination of attendance data suggests that continued poor attendance is the fundamental reason students in alternative schools fail to accumulate credit at a rate sufficient to ensure graduation.

The foregoing projections of student achievement are, at this time, hypothetical. A longitudinal study would be necessary to determine if student performance changed over time. We sought to substantiate our projections with graduation and discharge statistics collected by the Board of Education, but found that although the Board collects discharge data, it does not aggregate the data for the alternative schools. Were this data released in an atmosphere of support for the schools' efforts with high risk students, an accurate and reasonable assessment of the schools' effects could be obtained. Our limited data suggests that much remains to be learned about the education of high risk youngsters and points to the importance of early intervention.

D. EXPLANATION OF ATTENDANCE AND CREDIT ACCUMULATION AS
INDICATORS OF EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

The measures of attendance and credit accumulation we chose as indicators of academic effectiveness suggest that students in the alternative schools are learning more than they had in traditional schools. Admittedly, these quantitative measures are only indicators of achievement. Nonetheless, "time on task," represented to some extent by attendance, is a prime determinant of student achievement. Significantly, attendance and credit accumulation are highly correlated in our findings. When attendance improves, so does credit accumulation. If this were not the case, it could be suggested that credits were being given away.

However, a more difficult question exists: are the credits earned in these courses comparable to the credits earned in courses in traditional schools? No easy answer is available. On one hand, students in alternative schools are required to pass New York State Competency Tests and to take the same courses for a diploma as students in other New York City high schools. These include:

English	8 credits
Global History	3 credits
American Studies	2 credits
Economics	1 credit
Social Studies (elective)	1 credit
Science	4 credits
Mathematics	4 credits
Art	1 credit
Music	1 credit
Foreign Language*	2 credits
Introduction to Shop, Business and Hands-on Experience	4 credits
Health and Physical Education	1 credit
Area of Concentration and Electives	8 credits
TOTAL	40 credits

(Students must have a concentration of at least six credits in some credit area. Remaining credits in this category are available as free electives.)

* Waivers are possible.

The content of courses to fulfill subject-area requirements varies. A basic mathematics class at Redirection has the same goals as a parallel-level course at a neighboring comprehensive high school, for example, but those are clearly not the same goals as a geometry or calculus class at Brooklyn Tech. Similarly, college-level courses at City-As-School demand as much as advanced courses in any specialized high school. Since the academic preparedness of students in each of these schools is quite different, their curricula are as different from each other as Boys and Girls High School might be from Bronx Science.

What is similar in alternative schools is the "relevance" or student-centered nature of the curriculum. Student interest and need is the starting point - though not the final consideration - in curriculum development. A social studies class on Latin America at Satellite Academy, for example, will emphasize ethnic heritage and relate to the students' struggle for personal identity as it unravels the history of Latin America and develops the students' speaking and writing skills.

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL ALTERNATIVES: A THREE-SCHOOL PROFILE

The findings of improved student achievement reported in the previous section called for a closer look at successful alternative schools both to verify our statistical findings and to discover the characteristics of successful alternatives. We asked students and teachers in three alternative schools to compare their feelings about these schools and the other schools they had attended or served in and to identify the program elements they thought were responsible for the effectiveness of the alternative schools.

As noted in the Introduction, the three schools which were selected serve very different student populations; together they are representative of the diverse populations of schools and programs serving the dropout population. We interviewed 15 students and 15 staff at High School Redirection, 13 students and 12 staff at Satellite Academy and 20 students and 10 staff at City-As-School (C-A-S). Students interviewed were chosen from among the sample of incoming students whose records we analyzed based on their availability the days we interviewed. Teachers were chosen to represent the range of subject areas, length of service in the alternative school and teaching experience. The interview schedules were developed from Arno and Strout's (1978) integrative analyses of characteristics of effective alternative schools, and from the literature on effective schools by Edmonds (1979) and others. For coding responses to each question we used the aggregate number of responses (not respondents) as our total. If one student, for example, gave three reasons for attending City-As-School, all three were counted. Consequently, the percentages listed in the text refer to the percent that response was of the total number of responses to the question.

To confirm and support the reports of students and staff in the schools, research staff members also spent a total of two weeks in each school observing classes, staff meetings, assemblies and other aspects of daily life at school. Observations that illustrated the importance or irrelevance of particular factors for effective alternative schools were recorded. A specialist in adolescent development and secondary curricula also visited each school to provide an independent analysis of the instructional program and the educational climate.

A. SCHOOL BY SCHOOL PROFILE

The three case study schools have distinctive programs and serve students with quite different needs. The following vignettes are intended to provide readers with a context for analyzing the data which follows:

City-As-School (C-A-S)

Inspired by the success of the Parkway School in Philadelphia, Chancellor Harvey Scribner decided in early 1972 to introduce external learning in New York City. Many educators scoffed at the idea and warned of the dangers of mistaking mere "activity" for real learning, but in September 1972, Fred Koury, the current principal of City-As-School, a few teachers and 15 students from various high schools began designing an external learning program.

Not long after, City-As-School opened its doors in a Brooklyn brownstone as an independent alternative school that linked students to learning resources of the city. As the 70's advanced, economic pressures forced the school to "grow or go." It chose to grow, from 200 to 400 students, overran its quarters, and moved to Greenwich Village, where the school now occupies two floors of a former technical high school on Clarkson Street.

The location is new, but the purpose -- to link competent but disaffected students to the enormous training experiences available throughout the city -- remains the same. Students choose their internships from an expanding and changing resource catalogue. Over 265 resources, in a variety of business, civic, cultural, political and academic institutions, are listed in the Fall 1981 catalogue.* Students spend 20 to 32 hours per week in one or more of these learning experiences for one or more 10-week cycles of their four-cycle academic year. If they attend their resource 80 percent of the time and fulfill the academic requirements (reading, papers, etc.) outlined in their Learning Experience Activity Package (LEAP), they earn credit for the course.

* Many resources are in instructional settings: students take courses in universities throughout the city, museums and art studios.

Since only 10 percent of the academic offerings are taught in the C-A-S building, teachers have unusual roles: some serve as resource coordinators, others as student advisors. The resource coordinators are responsible for locating the internships, developing the LEAP curriculum, organizing the C-A-S catalogue, monitoring student progress, responding to problems at the resources, and registering students.

The advisors counsel more than 100 students each; they conduct enrichment and remediation classes in areas as varied as creative writing, basic mathematics and figure drawing; and they operate weekly seminars. The seminars give students an opportunity to discuss their resources, plan their academic programs, and conduct official class business. The students keep daily journals which they submit during "seminar."

To supplement the work of the advisors, C-A-S employs one full-time guidance counselor. Unpaid staff members include the enormous number of resource people who accept C-A-S interns.

High School Redirection

Launched in 1969 with Manpower Development funds at the peak of the War on Poverty, High School Redirection was originally an employment training program. In 1973, prompted by the program's success, the New York City Board of Education took over its full funding and management. The school became a diploma-granting institution for youngsters dissatisfied with and unsuccessful in the city's mainstream high schools.

Today, as then, virtually all of Redirection's 500-plus students enter its doors in exceptional circumstances: a great many are over-age for their grade, some have been suspended, some have had difficulty with the law, others are "emancipated minors," and quite a few have children of their own.

Located at 226 Bristol Street in Brooklyn's Brownsville section, the school is housed in a five-story brick elementary school building desperately in need of renovation and repair. Nevertheless, the program thrives under the direction of Stephen Phillips, Redirection's fourth principal in nine years, and the only person from outside the New York City school system to be selected for a principalship in recent history. Administratively, Redirection is a fairly typical high school. Its special features are a comprehensive approach to dropout prevention (literacy training, traditional courses, employment opportunities, counseling, day care, etc.) and emphasis

on individual students' academic needs. At the program's center is the official, credit-bearing class or CSP (an acronym for Civil Service Preparation, which was part of the school's earlier job preparation program). All students join a CSP group when they arrive at Redirection and usually remain in it with the same teacher and 32-35 students throughout their stay. Teachers advise students on academic, career and personal issues, monitor their attendance, aggregate credits accumulated in the school's diversified program, and develop a "helping relationship" during the daily CSP.

The credit accumulation system allows for further individualization. Like other alternative schools, Redirection organizes its curriculum around four cycles rather than two semesters to shorten the time span between learning and reinforcement (grades). The school's unique approach, called "continuous progress," allows students to acquire credit for even the smallest amounts of work they do in a class. Redirection students earn points with each skill they master and with every assignment they complete. They "bank" these points, each worth 1/100th credit, until they have accumulated enough to earn a diploma. If 40 credits are needed for a diploma, then a student at Redirection must earn 4000 points to graduate. Since every bit of learning counts and credit does not depend on passing an entire course, a Redirection student need never feel there is no reason to come to school.

Teachers develop contracts with their students to outline the basis on which points are awarded. Normally attendance, promptness, classwork, homework, participation, behavior and effort count as well as grades on tests. Each teacher also plans 50 points of extra credit work for students who want to accelerate, because many of them are over-age.

Another salient feature of the Redirection program is its emphasis on basic skills and departmental integration exemplified in the STAR Program. Each year STAR enrolls about 110 students: many are illiterate and all read below the 6.5 grade level. Based on their reading test results, the students are assigned to one of three self-contained, homogeneous classes taught by teachers licensed in academic subjects, assisted by paraprofessionals and learning disabilities teachers. For at least five periods a day, STAR students remain in these classes, receiving individualized and small group instruction. Reports indicate that STAR

students have an impressive 86 percent daily attendance rate.

The attendance program called APPLE is similarly supportive. Several staff members are assigned to call students who are absent, visit homes if the pattern continues, set up "attendance contracts" with clear goals when the problem is chronic, and counsel each chronically absent student on a daily basis until the pattern changes. If the pattern shows no sign of changing and the student is no longer interested in remaining at Redirection, referrals are made. Attendance in 1982 was about eight percent higher than 1981.

Satellite Academy High School for Career Education

Satellite Academy is one high school composed of four semi-autonomous academies located at different sites throughout the city: Manhattan (2), Bronx (1), and Queens (1). The academies share a common mission: improved academic achievement, development of emotional growth, and exposure to career education options. Within this framework, each academy has flexibility to fashion its own implementation program.

The emphasis on academic achievement, and the development of a structure which supports it, are the sources of much of the strength of Satellite Academy. The major structural support for its educational focus is a group management model for administration and planning. Thus, although the principal, Gloria Rakovic, is the chief administrator and responsible for supervision of the overall educational program, major policy decisions for the system are made by a Management Team composed of the coordinators of each academy and a staff representative from each. Within each academy, all staff members and the coordinator define educational goals and establish an annual contract with the principal identifying areas for evaluation. All staff members in each academy work as an active team with responsibility for performance, curriculum development and programming, and daily operations.

In addition to their managerial roles, teachers have extended responsibilities for student support services, i.e. personal and academic counseling, attendance, and programming. These services are conducted primarily in the context of student advisory groups through a group process in which students develop helping relationships among themselves and with the teacher advisor.

Teachers' extended managerial and counseling roles have important implications for the instructional program. Satellite teachers have the opportunity to know the needs of students and the authority to implement this understanding in relevant curricula. A very clear procedure exists for implementing new courses with considerable discussion and written exchange between the teacher, the coordinator of the academy and the principal.

Continual staff development is a major commitment of the principal to prepare teachers for their managerial roles, their increased instructional roles and for their diverse responsibilities for student support services. Rakovic conducts school-wide staff training days focusing on such issues as questioning techniques, learning through inquiry and interpersonal skills development. Within each academy, staff coach each other through a "round robin" system in which a teacher observes another teacher of his/her choice in class and then discusses the implications in a post-observation conference. Satellite teachers were found to have very high aspirations for achievement in the teaching profession in which they felt supported by the substantial opportunities to exercise managerial and instructional leadership.

Each academy is also committed to maximizing student participation in all areas of school life through formal and informal methods. For example, each student negotiates a contract around work and credit with the instructor of each class. Evaluations of student performance involve the student, the instructor and the peer group. Students also evaluate their courses and their responses are taken into account at a curriculum reorganization session beginning each cycle.

Each academy has a well-structured student governing body. An example is the Chambers Street Academy's CORE composed of student representatives from homeroom groups. CORE initiates certain matters of school policy such as installing a soda machine in the lunchroom. In reality, CORE cannot contradict staff decisions although it may modify them.

Student discipline is CORE's ultimate and major responsibility. When a student has violated critical school rules, as for example by fighting, he is given an appointment to appear before CORE with his teacher advisor as advocate, and any necessary witnesses. CORE will hear the evidence, render a decision and establish a consequence.

Our study focused on the Chambers Street Academy in Manhattan which has a population of approximately 160 students, making it the second smallest academy. The small size of the academy furthers the cohesiveness of the community and the personal quality of relationships among its members, but it also increases the pressures on staff to develop a large repertoire of courses. The academy is staffed by ten full-time teachers (including the coordinator), a paraprofessional and a counselor.

Students are admitted to the Chambers Street Academy following a student-run interview overseen by a staff member with motivation to learn as one of the major criteria for acceptance. New students attend a series of orientation sessions and are assigned a "buddy" who will check on their progress the first cycle and help them navigate the new system. As a consequence of this admission procedure and Chambers Street Academy's optimum location, students entering the school tend to be among the more highly motivated and to have slightly higher academic skills than students in the other academies. Overall, however, the Chambers Street Academy is representative of the program of the Satellite Academy as a whole.

B. STUDENT AND TEACHER SATISFACTION AND THEIR
PERCEPTION OF ITS SOURCES

Students and teachers reported a very high relative degree of satisfaction in each of the three alternative schools and the reasons they gave explain and support the statistical findings of improved student achievement. It was clear that students and teachers saw their new schools as meeting felt failures in the programs of the old.

Student Responses

When asked, "Why did you leave your former school?", students in the three schools most frequently cited the school's unsatisfactory climate. There were differences among the schools in the character of students' responses.

At High School Redirection, students gave three basic reasons:

They were involved with or afraid of the "gangs" and "violence" (50 percent).

They didn't understand the classes (25 percent).

They "hung out" and were not making progress (25 percent).

The violence that Redirection students experienced in some of their previous schools ranged from harassment and intimidation to robbery and assault.

At Satellite Academy, students expressed frustration with their former schools and disappointment with their own performance in those schools. They left because of:

Poor relationships among students and teachers (41 percent).

An unsatisfying academic program (17.5 percent).

The school was too big, too overwhelming (17.5 percent).

Too much academic pressure (12 percent).

Personal reasons (12 percent).

One Satellite student said:

"I had a lot of problems and school didn't help any. The relationship between teachers and students was so cold. Only one teacher was OK. I couldn't deal with it. Everybody was out for themselves."

City-As-School students left their previous schools for the following reasons:

It was too confining (35 percent).

It was unsafe and the students were disruptive (20 percent).

The teachers didn't care (15 percent).

The curriculum was unrelated to their special talent or need (15 percent).

Other factors (15 percent).

The actual language the City-As-School students used to describe their former schools displays their bitterness and hurt:

"It was like a jail; you had to have a note for everything, even to go to the bathroom."

"It was like being in the army."

When asked, "What made you decide to come to this school?" and "What were you hoping to get?", students in all these schools said the desire to "get that piece of paper," the high school diploma, brought them back to school in the first place (96 percent). Students chose the alternative schools for a better climate and a more suitable educational program to improve their chance of earning a diploma.

When asked, "What is the biggest difference to you between this school and your old school?", students generally said the biggest difference was the "caring atmosphere" in the alternative school. This response was followed closely by that of the more satisfactory instructional program. Again, there were differences among the schools in the way students expressed their concerns.

High School Redirection students said people at Redirection got along better (56 percent). Twenty-five percent said individual help was the main difference; two students (12 percent) said smaller size.

At Satellite Academy, 60 percent of the students cited positive relationships with teachers. Twenty percent felt they could learn better at Satellite, ten percent liked the small size and the relaxed atmosphere, and another ten percent cited their autonomy at Satellite.

City-As-School students said that the biggest difference between the alternative school and their former schools was that the learning at C-A-S was more vital (60 percent), the atmosphere was more personal (20 percent), and there was freedom from the restrictiveness of daily classes and excessive control (20 percent).

Teacher Responses

When teachers and staff were asked, "How does this school benefit you (personally or professionally)?", their responses reflect both general satisfaction with their experience in the alternative schools and frustrations specific to each school.

At High School Redirection, all the staff expressed satisfaction with the work they were doing with students (100 percent). They said:

"We really help kids here."

"It's enormously satisfying to open up the world to someone."

"I have a sense of being needed and accomplishing something important."

"Things get done. We can see a real payoff."

"We teach the whole student."

One staff member felt isolated from other teachers, but all others were enthusiastic about the climate. Two staff members said they had "burned out" as teachers, but they were not currently teaching and felt positive about their administrative roles.

At Satellite Academy, all teachers said they derived personal satisfaction from their work, their relationships with other staff members, the recognition they got in the community, the exposure to individuals with different lifestyles, and their impact on students. One teacher, however, complained about the stress she felt working in the school and said her health had deteriorated recently. Additionally, every staff member at Satellite felt he or she had grown professionally by working in the school. Staff had the opportunity to take on a lot of different administrative responsibilities and develop their teaching.

At C-A-S, most staff (90 percent) reported a mixture of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Their satisfaction in the school had several sources: the pleasant atmosphere, the diversity of tasks from administration to counseling, the creativity and flexibility allowed, and a variety of other factors. The central source of their dissatisfaction was the fact that the organization of the school had not yet been adapted for the increased size (400 students). This handicapped their efforts to account for student learning.

When asked, "What makes this a good school?", teachers in the three schools generally agreed the positive relationship between students and

teachers was the crucial element in alternative schools that created a better climate for learning.

"Students immediately sense the difference in relationships with teachers here. They look for an adult to attach themselves to so they can develop a relationship. They relate about anything. Sometimes the kids talk off the wall and you know something is going on, so you ask them about it."

"The hostility and bureaucracy of the traditional school is null and void here. There is a firm commitment by staff to see that Johnny functions here. Staff is nurtured by contact with the students. Students feel the difference-- it energizes students."

"There's always someone who will listen to them. Students are not just bodies lost in the crowd like they are in a big school."

Although teachers in each of the schools said that positive relationships were the crucial element, they identified somewhat different factors as also contributing to success.

At High School Redirection, staff members said its small size lets them relate to students in more personal and caring ways (66 percent). They also cited administrative support as an important factor (33 percent). The administrators "respect teachers," "eliminate burdens," and stay informed about new ideas and practices, the teachers said.

The staff at Satellite said that the best feature of the school was the relationship between students and staff (27 percent). They also cited student and staff involvement in decision making (16 percent), the freedom of choice for both students and staff (11 percent), small size (13 percent), a dedicated and high quality staff (11 percent), the philosophy and organization of the school (11 percent), the commitment within the community as a whole to make the school work (8 percent), and the informal atmosphere (3 percent).

The faculty at C-A-S generally shared their students' perceptions of what made the school successful. Interestingly, though, few explicitly mentioned external learning as a key factor; they tended to emphasize the individual attention this made possible, rather than the experience itself. They said the best features were individualized attention and support (28 percent), freedom from bureaucratic restrictions (25 percent), positive student-teacher relations (25 percent), informality (13 percent), and students getting excited about learning (9 percent).

In summary, the satisfaction students and teachers feel in their relationships and in their learning or teaching are important outcomes in themselves. When these are coupled with objective gains in student attendance and credit accumulation, one knows these alternative schools are providing an important educational opportunity for students sorely in need of one.

Both students and teachers point to a number of factors which contribute to their satisfaction and achievement: school organization and program components such as small size, individualized attention, vital student-centered curricula; and components of the school climate such as personalized teacher-student relationships, participation in administration and instructional decisions, and student choice and autonomy. These components of successful alternative programs will be described and discussed in the sections which follow.

C. SCHOOL ORGANIZATION AND PROGRAM

The previous section discussed students' perception of the two main sources of their satisfaction in the three case study schools: better human relations and a more appropriate instructional program. This section will discuss some of the features of the three schools which the investigators believe contribute to their instructional success. This discussion flows from the interviews we conducted with students and staff at City-As-School, High School Redirection and Satellite Academy, and several weeks of observation in each school.

1. Clear Mission and Well-Defined Student Population

Most of the city's alternatives are small, flexible student-centered learning communities. They are, in many ways, social organizations utterly different from the large, bureaucratically organized, sometimes rigid schools which are traditional in our system. But to be successful in educational terms, we have learned it is not enough for an alternative school to be simply student-centered. The students in one alternative school which concentrates primarily on adolescents' emotional development uniformly complained that their academic needs were not being met. An alternative school must also have a clear educational mission. Staff must know what they want to accomplish academically, in addition to emotionally and socially, to create a sound program. As staff in one of our three case study schools told us:

"We have an educational philosophy that is lived and talked about here. This is not often done in schools. We have a conceptual framework that's clear and people will see when you have violated the philosophy."

"In the beginning there was a kind of flaky idealism among the staff. We thought alternatives meant letting the students do what they want without confronting them. Teachers have recognized that they were exhausting themselves, and that it's just not legitimate, for example, for a student to leave the classroom for a cigarette break. The school has become more structured and standards have gone up a lot. The school is better now; the changes have been positive."

Knowing what you need to do means knowing your students and tailoring your academic program to them. City-As-School, for example, is not just an experiential learning program, it is an experiential learning program

focused on academically able students who have not flourished in regimented schools. Satellite Academy is not simply oriented toward truants who have academic problems, it accepts only those students who have responsible attitudes and can handle a serious curriculum. While Redirection admits everybody and its student population is more varied than Satellite Academy's or C-A-S's, literally "everybody" does not come. A sizeable percentage of their students are educationally handicapped and very few have truly superior skills.

Because of the relative complexity of its mission, the number of students it admits with severe reading problems and the recognition that there is a special art and science to teaching reading to an older population, Redirection has developed a self-contained literacy program (STAR). The strength of the STAR program is its link to the rest of the school through which it is able to provide the supportive services -- counseling, employment, day care -- necessary for, yet so often missing from, literacy programs. In addition, unlike many special focus or short-term programs, STAR is able to take individual students from one point to another. As they attain the appropriate level of mastery, students are integrated into the mainstream of the school. Although this is done gradually and only involves travel from the third to the second floor of the school, it is a difficult transition for students and illustrates the tremendous need for comprehensiveness as well as continuity in dropout prevention programming. It also illustrates nicely our original point that a small school, if it orients its program appropriately, can meet limited specialized as well as general academic needs.

Our early visits to the full complement of alternative schools suggest that some have not learned to live within the limits which smallness demands. There are schools which attempt to teach students with unrelated instructional needs. None are among the schools which this study found to have the greatest impact on student achievement. It takes a great deal of creativity and know-how to devise an educational program which works for everybody in a small school.

2. Instructional Leadership

The literature on effective schools emphasizes the importance of principals assuming responsibility for the development and organization

of their schools' overall instructional program (Edmonds, 1979). Yet many principals are kept from their instructional tasks by overwhelming administrative responsibilities. For at least two reasons, the administrative burdens principals face in alternative schools are less onerous than those in traditional schools. One, the schools are simply smaller, less complex and less bureaucratic. Two, the staffing patterns in alternative schools frequently encourage faculty to take on administrative responsibilities. At City-As-School, for example, the faculty is largely responsible for the daily management of the school. At Satellite the principal has carefully orchestrated arrangements for the staff collaboratively to exercise administrative authority as well as administrative responsibility.

Interestingly, despite the opportunities in alternative schools for principals to become instructional leaders and despite encouragement from "authorities" that they do so, some don't. This was true even among our case study schools, and not without repercussion. There was abundant dissatisfaction among faculty in one school because they felt responsible for the administration of the program yet were unable to determine its direction or influence the principal regarding it.

In the two schools where faculty were pleased with the instructional role of their principal, we found much greater clarity of purpose and overall satisfaction. Those teachers described their principals in these ways:

"...incredibly perceptive...knows what should go on in the class and can convey this to teachers...leads by example rather than by authoritative pronouncements...has very high expectations from the staff."

"...very innovative; tries new methods and gets involved with the staff."

"...tremendously concerned about the quality of the educational services we give to our students."

"...able to handle the conflict between the 'alternative stance,' which is to try something if it will work and you can get away with it, and 'the Board of Education stance,' which is to get hung for trying anything."

3. Extended Roles for Teachers

Teachers in each of the case study schools have diverse responsibilities beyond the instructional. Many are engaged in some aspect of their

schools' administrations and most have responsibility for student guidance.

Teachers were extremely enthusiastic about role diversification for a variety of reasons, but primarily because it allowed them to grow professionally while enhancing their schools' effectiveness. They felt the collaborative, flexible style reduced alienation and increased their productivity, and this was corroborated by our observations.

Additionally, teachers said their extended roles enhanced the instructional program. Their responsibility for student support services enabled them to understand student needs, and because they were directly responsible for curriculum development and programming, they could immediately implement their understanding in relevant course offerings.

A case in point occurred at Satellite Academy. At a staff meeting a teacher expressed concern about the number of girls in her counseling group who were becoming pregnant. After discussion the teachers concluded that many of their students lacked knowledge about contraception and sex in general. They decided these issues should be discussed in the general biology class. The science teacher developed a new curriculum and piloted it. But he realized he was not comfortable with some of the new curriculum and student feedback on the first cycle was not positive, so another teacher volunteered to teach the course with him with more success. In this school the extension of teachers into counseling and administration enhanced their sensitivity to students' needs and improved program development and implementation.

Such diversification and flexibility is a central reason these small alternative schools with limited resources are able to rival resource-rich conventional schools. It is no revelation that large schools often fail to adjust their organizational style and instruction quickly to the needs of students. The ability to apply resources directly and collaboratively to problems, unhampered by bureaucratic restraints, is a major strength of the best alternative schools.

4. Student-Centered Curriculum

Alternative schools are said to be "student-oriented." Critics often take this to mean they are big on process and soft on content, but the testimony of students and staff in these schools and the data generated herein on student performance make clear that the schools are not soft

on content: they simply approach content differently. The three schools studied emphasize basic skills and fundamentals of inquiry in the various disciplines of high school curriculum. As one student said:

"You have a contract and you have to do that work to get points. You live up to it because you choose it. I thought this school was going to be easy, but it's not."

However, to give these disciplines greater hold on students, teachers ground their instruction in their students' experience. Their instructional choices -- sex education in "Biology," Black or Latin studies in "History," a basic reading course or a job with a production company in "English" -- are aimed at breaking through the syndrome of disinterested students skipping ten chapters of a 15-chapter course and being perpetually behind and ill-educated. It is an effort to present the essential content in a format which catches students' interest and moves them along to broader principles. Students stressed the importance of the school making connections between academic material and their personal lives:

"We are learning things that are happening in our lives. They teach us what is actually going on, and they show us the easiest possible way to do something."

"They teach you what's real. Like economics, they teach us about taxes and inflation and stuff. Even in reading and math, they tell you what's happening."

"What I've learned is how to make it after I leave here. I've learned about the economy. Times are hard. There's inflation, unemployment. Once we leave here we have to face those things. They say to us, 'It's going to be rough, but this is how to do it.'"

5. Fast Feedback

Virtually all alternative schools in the city enroll students who have been truants. The three we studied organize their instruction to provide such students ongoing rewards and incentives for attendance. All provide students with faster feedback by dividing the year into four cycles rather than two semesters. They clarify what is expected of students and individualize instruction by using contracts which explain the level of work required to generate a certain grade or number of credits.

When contracts are used, credit is awarded for whatever assigned work is completed, and it is difficult to fail completely. Two teachers

explained it this way:

"We put students in courses where they can succeed. For disadvantaged kids, we need to reorganize their experience so that they can experience success, but not cheap success. We make high demands that they can meet. We must give them the information they need for a more intelligent life. A lot of students here have a low opinion of themselves. We want to make it easier for them so they are more comfortable with learning. The work is comparable to remedial classes in regular schools but they are more comfortable here."

"The point system allows students to get credit for what they do. Success is built in. Even if you do only a little, you get that amount of credit. It keeps them coming."

The students agreed:

"The work is OK once you put your mind to it. Even if you're not working so good, if you come and try, you get something for that."

"Here I can pass all my courses at diminished credit for the first time! There is no better credit system in the city."

To help students make up for semesters in their previous schools when they earned no credit, all three of the target schools also allow for and encourage accelerated credit accumulation through independent study, extra credit assignments and, in the case of C-A-S, added courses. Together, these various mechanisms give students much more frequent and well-defined feedback. They allow students to control the pacing and orientation of their work. As Newmann (1982) and others have said, this greatly reduces alienation from academic work. A student explained it very aptly:

"I feel better about school because I am learning what I want to learn. I feel more like a person. At my previous high school, they treated us like smart monkeys. Learning was not seen as being for ourselves, or controlled by ourselves. We were ushered from class to class. There was no room for anything else."

6. Interactive, Non-Competitive Classrooms

The classroom process is designed to keep formerly truant and disinterested students involved. At C-A-S, the "classroom" is outside the

school and it takes advantage of countless resources in New York City. In the typical Satellite classroom students work in teams on projects, respond to or ask questions, share experiences related to the lessons and tutor each other. They also listen to lectures, but passive listening does not dominate. At Redirection students and teachers maintain a consistent and lively dialogue. When the back and forth stops, students work on individual assignments tailored to their basic skills needs.

The instructional style in these schools is similar to that of elementary school classes (alive with discourse and activity, student-centered, and self-paced). At the same time there is a concern for content and a strong expectation that everyone will learn high school level subject matter. Each student has a learning contract, each student's attendance is monitored, and no one is written off or ignored. Students told us:

"I'm learning more here than where I used to go. People had told me this would be a dummy school. But it's not. The classes are advanced. Teachers will hold the class to explain the work to you. At my old school, if you didn't understand, they thought it was because you didn't listen. Here, even if it is your fault, they'll explain."

"Teachers make you learn more. In other schools, students are sleeping or talking in class. Not here -- you can ask any questions you feel like."

Reinforcing classroom emphasis on cooperation and sharing are school-wide efforts at youth participation. At Redirection there is a formal peer tutoring program. At Satellite Academy all incoming students have peer advisors, and students play a major role in developing and maintaining disciplinary and even academic standards. The City-As-School internship program is inherently participatory. These constructive involvements reduce the need for adolescents to exercise their independence and exorcise their powerlessness by attacking the institutions set up to serve them.

7. Small Size

It is unclear how much of the variance in student performance in alternative schools rests on small size. The foregoing discussion of the organizational and programmatic features of three successful alternative schools emphasizes the importance of faculty knowing students and being able to respond, under the guidance of the principal, with appropriate

programs. A substantial number of teachers and students stated that smallness is the sine qua non of such responsiveness. It seems apparent at the extreme ends of the spectrum that smallness makes communication, an important aspect of effective programming, more attainable. But smallness alone cannot create satisfying relationships or academic focus.

Indeed, smallness presents some significant organizational challenges. Both Satellite Academy and High School Redirection students require an instructional program which emphasizes the basic skills, and the schools are able to construct such a program, but there is little room for specialization in such areas as art, music and science. To compensate for the limited number of options, Satellite Academy faculty are continuously developing new course offerings for subsequent cycles. (City-As-School does not face this problem; their students are generally able to succeed in the less structured world of the academic internship where options are limitless.)

Another serious problem related to small size, but not inherent in it, is reduced options for job preparation. The alternative schools emphasize career education in their counseling groups and have made efforts to find federally sponsored and private sector jobs for their students, but there is only minimal on-site vocational training. It seems, at least in part, that because of their small size the schools have been overlooked as funds for training equipment become available.

Based on this study, our initial conclusion is that a school must be large enough to provide sufficient resources for students but small enough to allow them to feel a part of a group with clear limits and dimensions. Our research does not clarify the size question beyond that generalization, but work on student participation (Barker and Gump, 1964), affiliation among adolescents (Garbarino, 1980), and delinquency (Garbarino, 1978; Gottfredson and Darjer, 1979) favors secondary schools of about 500 to 1200 students.

D. THE CLIMATE FOR LEARNING IN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

The foregoing discussion of teaching and learning in the three case study schools suggests that a good deal of their success derives from their faculties' special understanding of students' needs. This section discusses the ways the schools develop and use this understanding to engage students in the learning process. The attempt is both to describe and explain the uniquely cohesive, internally ordered environment which we found to prevail in the three schools. In these schools control seems intrinsic rather than imposed, and the atmosphere bespeaks mutual respect and interest in learning. We believe such a climate is a function of personal relationships focused on learning. The findings are based on the interviews previously described and a month of observation in the schools' classrooms, halls, meeting rooms and offices.

1. Positive Student-Teacher Relationships

The norm in these schools is that students can talk about anything with teachers, not just academic subject matter. This freedom of expression and the willingness of teachers to listen gives students the opportunity to integrate more of themselves into their student roles. It clearly generates a greater attachment to school:

"When I first came here, the teachers gave me the 'OK' to be myself. At my old school I had to be serious. Here I have to be mature. And there's a big difference between being serious and mature."

"Students are able to confide in teachers, and we can ask questions without feeling self-conscious or uncomfortable in class or in private."

Teachers are very conscious of their efforts in this regard:

"We never will turn anyone away, instead we welcome kids to sit and talk. Even if I can't reach a particular kid, there will be someone who can."

"Students feel they can trust the people here. A girl came to talk to me a few days ago just because she had gotten off drugs and wanted to stay busy. In another school, the kids would be afraid to tell you that."

At times, the demands students make can overwhelm the teachers, but in general, they say they benefit personally and their teaching is enhanced by knowing more about their students.

"Kids are very open about their thoughts and experiences. I know much more about the kids I teach here. It enriches my teaching."

Teachers in these schools report personal as well as professional satisfaction in their relationships with students. Rather than distracting attention from educational matters, the personal relationships between teachers and students enhance the learning that takes place. One student observed:

"The students and teachers really seem to care about you as an individual, not as just another student in the school. This is very important because a student cannot function well in school if she doesn't have a certain type of support from teachers. I feel that since I have been getting the individual attention I need, I can concentrate on my studies, feel relaxed and accomplish what I came here to do."

The relationships in alternative schools are informal rather than hierarchical. Students and teachers are not peers, but the teachers' authority is based on their own strengths rather than their formal roles:

"The school has encouraged my own propensity to relate to the students personally and to demand the most of them and myself. In a regular school I could hide my failures in anonymity. I could form callouses to students. But I would never be able to protect myself from my own expectations, so this is the best place for me."

Classroom informality is often symbolized by the use of first names. One teacher said:

"I was tense at first with the first name basis. I thought it would mean the end of respect. But it puts you on an even footing and that feels better. Students slip right into it and they don't take advantage. At first when I was called by my first name, I didn't answer. I didn't know they were talking to me."

The alternative schools we studied have certain characteristics in common which promote these positive student-teacher relationships.

These include advisory roles for teachers, extensive counseling, special attendance programs, teacher and student participation, personal choice and avoiding threat in disciplinary matters.

2. Teacher As Advisor

Teachers in each of these schools are round-the-clock advisors. Both in the course of their instructional duties and in other contexts, they perform the duties of dean, grade advisor, attendance officer, guidance counselor, college advisor and records secretary. Each teacher is generally responsible for the full range of services for the 15-40 students assigned to his/her homeroom. Students are not adrift in a large anonymous group: at least one adult is responsible for the "whole student." Students experience this arrangement as "caring." In addition, subject teachers in these small schools know many students, most of whom they have taught in several classes. So there is a large support system for each student. These responsibilities increase the demands on teachers and raise conflicts between concern for the personal struggles of students and concern about standards for student performance and behavior. One teacher put it this way:

"I have a student who's been doing pretty well, but last week she was absent all week. Now that puts her over the days absent she can have on her contract (five days). She came to me and confided that she had discovered her boyfriend was seeing another girl and it just drove her crazy. She had pulled herself together and was ready to come to class again. I can understand what she has been through and that she's trying hard to stick with it. Still she knew and the class knows what the agreement is. I've been thinking about it all week."

Nonetheless, none of the teachers we spoke to wanted to alter the role. Nearly all of the teachers said they felt more satisfaction than they had in traditional schools, especially because their efforts produced clear, positive results in students.

"I feel good. I look forward to coming. Sometimes my family wants me to take a day off, but I just can't do it. I have built up a momentum with these kids. Students learn something every day."

3. Group Counseling

Teachers in the schools we studied carry out many of their advisor responsibilities in small counseling groups. These groups meet for one period once, twice and five times a week at C-A-S, Satellite and High School Redirection, respectively. Students receive partial elective credit for these groups, which have differently stated goals in each school. From our observation, each group is an ongoing forum for problem solving and taking care of school business such as student program decisions and attendance problems. It is a context to develop fostering relationships in which students can seek help from adults and their peers and learn to give help to others. It is a forum for socializing students into the norms of the school, such as taking responsibility for one's own education. None of the schools had a standard curriculum for the small groups. The philosophy seemed to be that teachers are best left to conduct the group in the way they feel most comfortable. One teacher said:

"When I first came here I was afraid of teaching the /guidance/ class the most. But I started with a new group of kids and I learned so much! I learned about the whole student. I really enjoy that part of the day now. It is difficult, but it's challenging."

4. Attendance Strategies

The small counseling group is the centerpiece of the overall attendance strategies in each of the three schools studied. It is here that expectations of attendance are indoctrinated, individual difficulties affecting attendance are discussed, and support services such as referrals for child care are arranged or provided. The small counseling group is also used to organize peer support and monitor attendance in two of the schools. When a student is absent, the teacher-advisor is the first to make personal contact with the student by phone. If absences continue, this personal contact is followed by a series of phone calls and letters conducted by office staff or para-professionals. Incentives such as internships and employment opportunities are tied to improved attendance in two of the schools. Sanctions, such as loss of credit, are used at Satellite and seem effective with

some students. Sanctions are not thought to be useful, however, with High School Redirection's students for whom failure has been the order of the day.

The setting of standards for attendance has important repercussions for the participation of students and for the school's program. Satellite, for example, sets very high standards for attendance: five absences allowed per cycle. Students who do not meet this standard are given extensive counseling and program modifications to encourage them to attend more frequently. If these efforts fail, students sign a "discharge" contract, agreeing to accept a discharge if their performance does not improve in the following cycle. According to the coordinator of the Chambers Street Academy, between five and eight discharge contracts a year actually eventuate in discharge of students. Figures are not available on the number of students who drop out of Satellite for failing to measure up to standards, but it is apparent that students with intractable attendance problems do not remain on Satellite's rolls. Satellite thereby maintains an active population of relatively committed students ready to capitalize on the offerings of the school.

In contrast, High School Redirection acknowledges that the majority of its students were formerly long term absentees (L.T.A.'s) and dropouts, and that they require flexibility as well as structure. A point system of credit which rewards students for each day of work completed builds in flexibility. This creates some problems of discontinuity for teachers, but they have adapted to the particular needs of their students. On the other hand, once High School Redirection students develop a pattern of absence, they, like Satellite Academy students, are placed on an attendance contract. They must report to a guidance counselor for daily counseling and have 90 percent attendance for a month to avoid discharge. Because students can be readmitted at any time, discharge is not a sanction as used here, but a guidance tool.

The schools' experiences illustrate the potential of a systematic attendance strategy which includes setting standards of attendance appropriate to one's mission and student population and monitoring adherence to those standards. It also suggests the limitations of this approach. Satellite's strategy affords students who avoid or survive discharge contracts the benefits of higher accomplishment

and a more vital school context. But an unknown number of students are lost. They may be youth who would profit from the more flexible approach taken in Redirection. The two approaches might be hard to integrate in one small school. However, these issues are difficult to address in the absence of clear accounting and follow-up of students who drop out.

5. Positive Relationships Among Students

Positive relationships among students stand out as a conspicuous feature of two of the alternative schools, High School Redirection and Satellite Academy. City-As-School students, who are more often than not "out in the field," reported that they missed contact with other students.

The consistent encouragement of students to work together results in mutually supportive relationships among students. One student said:

"The atmosphere is good for me. Everyone is nice and they help you out. Students will come and talk to you if they see you are falling behind."

And one teacher put it this way:

"It's really funny. One of my students has always had a real problem with attendance, although she's moving along slowly. Last week one of the boys came back to school after being out for four days, and she gave him hell! 'What are you trying to do? You better get your act together!' She was great!"

Traditional schools often try to break up peer culture that develops among students, rather than use it in positive ways. So teenagers are forced to develop their culture counter to the adult culture of the school. Two of the alternative schools, on the other hand, create opportunities for developing a positive peer culture within the school, with noticeable results. We observed few, if any, students "hanging out" to socialize with their peers. There appear to be fewer cliques based on status or race, and there is a tolerance for difference often missing among adolescents. In these schools, to an extraordinary degree, the peer culture takes the positive goals of the schools as its own.

6. Student and Teacher Participation

The mode of student and teacher participation which prevails in each of these schools fosters the climate of commitment and collaboration. Participation is encouraged by both formal and informal means. Satellite Academy has the most highly formalized structure with its group management model. The ten to fifteen staff members in each academy make many decisions by consensus including policy on new courses, programming, performance standards, hiring, etc. A student representative government has the authority to ratify staff policy suggestions and to propose policies of its own. C-A-S has a less formal apparatus for student participation. Students may volunteer to take a student leadership course in which they might, for example, edit a school newspaper or work on a graduation ceremony. Staff at C-A-S are virtually autonomous within their own departments, but school-wide decisions are largely made by the principal alone. In all three schools, students set contracts and evaluate courses as ways of participating in educational planning.

Informal ways of soliciting student and staff participation seem to work effectively in these schools. At High School Redirection the principal seeks ideas from teachers. He shows by his actions that he has taken an idea seriously, and he gives good reasons if he has not acted on a suggestion. Teachers in this small school, with its fairly traditional administrative structure, expressed a higher degree of ownership over the school than they had felt in their former schools. This is largely because the principal is accessible. Students, however, reported a lack of student extracurricular activities, clubs and teams, all ways for them to participate more in school life. Staff expressed the hope that once the school had settled into its new site, these activities could be instituted.

Teachers in all of the schools felt school problems could be talked about openly and worked through to resolution. They commented:

"I feel that if I have a problem with something, I can go right to him /the principal/ and speak my piece. Usually he will take action on my suggestion or convince me that I am wrong."

"It's very involving here for both teachers and students. It's intimate, chaotic, hopeless, fun. It's not always positive. But it's a place where it's all right to talk about everything. The neighborhood high school I taught in was a machine. We spent all our energy keeping the tremendous wheels rolling. There were new faces every six months. Here we have a chance to work things out."

Students said:

"I'm learning to talk to people. I'm not as scared. In my old school, everyone is scared. I'm learning about life, about myself."

"It took me a while to adjust to this place after coming from a school with so much tension. I was never able to talk to the principal, my advisor or any teacher in school. But now I feel comfortable enough and often enough to approach anyone at Satellite and get help. I don't feel self-conscious about asking for help, whether it's a personal problem or a school problem."

In traditional schools, most students are seen as passive consumers of subject matter rather than as essential to the functioning of the organization. Therefore students become disaffected and they miss out on opportunities to learn responsibility.

Because of their small size and their participatory style, alternative schools provide a variety of significant administrative and social functions for larger proportions of their students. Students involved in active, essential roles begin to perceive themselves differently and in turn are perceived differently by others. They develop a sense of positive identity.*

7. Student Choice

Students in each of the schools reported that choosing their own courses was tremendously important to them. This came across strongly even at Satellite Academy and High School Redirection, which have very limited course offerings compared to the large schools students had attended. Most of the students we interviewed had been assigned

* Willems (1967) found additionally that students learn more about how the world/institution works through taking active roles and they get usable feedback on their level of functioning. When the outcomes of their actions are truly important to others, learning becomes more significant and binds them to others.

programs in their former schools and felt that the degree of choice they could exercise in the alternative school was significant.

Another aspect of student choice, also limited in nature, had a strong impact on students, and that was voluntary membership in the school. Although in most cases their other options were fairly limited, they take pride in having found a good school.

Making decisions encourages students to mature. One said:

"The difference is that here I am learning to act as an individual. I am learning how to integrate myself with the system of life. Here you have choices. It helps you fit where you really fit. The school is helping me play a more meaningful role in whatever I do."

A teacher said:

"We give them the opportunity to learn to make decisions for themselves -- to decide and to be who they want to be."

8. Avoiding Threat

Students expressed tremendous relief that there were no fights between students in the alternative schools. This was expressed even by students who themselves had gotten into trouble in their former schools.

Several factors contribute to the calm and productive climate of these schools. Teachers are trained to neutralize disputes among students and between students and themselves. The small size and the cohesive atmosphere of these schools reduces frustration and alienation. Rules which undermine self-respect and autonomy are nonexistent; there are no bathroom passes, for example, and students may leave the building to get lunch. Common rules include requirements for course credit, prohibitions against fighting, requirements to notify school staff when one will be absent, etc. One teacher had this to say about rules:

"This is not simple. We all know each other here; students can make more demands and they'll get responded to; that doesn't happen in a large school. On the other hand, we can't be as permissive as a large school. Though we have only a few rules, they have to be enforced or things will fall apart. So we're more relaxed because there's less threat here -- but we're less permissive. It's also true that our kids, almost all our kids, have had overwhelming prob-

lems at one time; they're not just typical students. Sometimes something happens within themselves or within their families and they fall apart. We make things different, but we've got to stay on top of it all or what we have here could fall apart too."

Reducing sources of conflict still further, school rules come directly from persons who are known and accessible: the principal, the teachers, and in some cases, the student government.

Few of the schools rely primarily on punishments such as suspension for violations of school rules. Teachers are trained formally or through modeling to neutralize student frustration by talking rationally and listening empathetically. Teachers do not intervene in disputes in an authoritarian way, making themselves an easy target for increased student hostility. Disagreements are seen as an opportunity to teach better problem-solving skills to each student involved. Students talked about teachers' abilities to avert fights in this way:

"There are no fights. Teachers don't press you that much. In a regular school, they press you. 'You have to do this!' they say. So you say, 'I don't have to! I'll stop.' My teacher presses me in a different way. She presses you in a way you think she really wants to help you. 'You'll be hurting yourself,' she says."

"Teachers are not on your back. They just care if you're there and you're learning."

"Teachers here are able to calm students down. Teachers know how to talk to students."

The alternative schools make a concerted, but flexible, effort to remove the threat of outside visitors. Satellite Academy has a policy that allows any current student to bring one visitor to school for the entire day. This obviates the need for outsiders to come into the school to visit friends or hang around outside. High School Redirection has three security guards and several aides to screen people entering the school and to monitor the hallways.

Small size, personal attention, informality and the relatively

simple rules reduce discipline problems in these schools.*

One student described how the difference between the climate of his former school and the alternative school affected his behavior:

"My old school was WILD. There were fights. There was shooting in there. Last year a student was shot and killed in front of the school. I got into trouble myself. I just couldn't take it. One year I got no credits. The next year I didn't go. The noise and all was so terrible I couldn't even think in the class. I couldn't concentrate on what I was doing because the students were wild. They were wild.

"Basically it's quiet here. There are no fights. I like the teachers. I've gotten to know some of the teachers, and I have some good relationships. It was hard for me at first because I had bad habits. I was lazy at first but I got help from my CSP /guidance/ teacher. She got on me a lot. She said I was lazy and I could do better. Most of the teachers tell me that. At my old school, the teachers didn't care about teaching, but I don't blame them. Here the teachers are more serious. They are willing to help you more. They make it to where you do it yourself. It's serious, but it's enjoyable."

9. Inadequate School Facilities and Supplies

The climate of the alternative schools was negatively affected by inadequate facilities and a lack of supplies and resources. Students in the three schools studied in detail reported that their buildings need improvements: some were not properly painted, others lacked decent bathrooms, heat and important facilities like gyms, labs and lunchrooms. Redirection and Satellite Academy students had the related problem of meager resources; they reported that there were too few books and insufficient supplies to go around. The staff shared these concerns. In each alternative school they described an unpleasant or inadequate building and the absence of appropriate resources for courses, extra-curricular activities and the daily operations of

* Ianni (1979) found that large size, over-crowding and population density are responsible for schools' high incidence of student violence and disruptive behaviors.

the school. In High School Redirection, the purchase of a photocopy machine would consume the major portion of one year's budget for school supplies, creating a series of compromises which negatively affected the school program. In each of the schools the detrimental effects of poor facilities and an inadequate supply budget (Other Than Personnel Services budget) on student and staff morale were compounded by the perception of staff that they reflected a lack of school system recognition and support.

CONCLUSION

This study was undertaken in the hope that the alternative schools, which have worked for years with little recognition or support, could tell us something important about educating the large numbers of adolescent youth who are dropping out of school. We have not been disappointed. The study has taught us both that the schools have a success story -- and what the crucial elements of that success are. It has also shown some of the limits of that success to date and suggested and identified specific needs the schools do not -- perhaps cannot -- meet. Further, it has identified a number of important questions for future inquiry. Indeed, the study has been as illuminating in the questions it raises as in those it answers.

The fundamental, though certainly not exclusive, strengths of successful alternative schools are their sharply focused academic programs and their capacity to engage students and teachers in a dialogue which reaches beyond the formality and rigidity of roles into the reality of individual lives, in other words, to foster creative human relationships. In the best schools, these relationships are not set apart from nor simply allowed to dangle alongside the instructional and organizational features of the school. They inform the curriculum and structure of the school and clear the way for teaching and learning, the goal toward which everything aims.

Differentiated staff roles and small school size critically influence the capacity of alternative schools to foster positive student-teacher relationships. Small school size, indeed, seemed to many teachers the sine qua non of effective programming. Small school size, however, requires a very sharp curriculum focus, and that means small schools must serve a fairly narrow band of students. One could argue that this is socially isolating and that very small schools -- those under 500 students -- are out of step with the broad based expectation for a "common school" experience. The conflicting claims of those who believe in special programs and those who believe in the common school may to some extent account for the school system's failure to do more programming for at-risk youth. The experience

of alternative schools suggests that the advantages of this specialized approach outweigh the disadvantages. Furthermore the claims of both can be resolved if small schools conscientiously develop opportunities for their students, including academic, extra-curricular, social and vocational programs, in the mainstream. Alternatively, the school system could move toward moderate size schools of 800-1200 students and preserve heterogeneity as well as focus and community.

Of particular significance for public policy, we think, is the finding that students who attend alternative schools are single-minded about wanting a diploma. We have also learned that these students, properly encouraged, do not obdurately resist cognitive development beyond the basic skills. Indeed they come to like school once it becomes associated with learning rather than failure and coercion. Despite improved attitudes and achievement, however, the attendance of many remains erratic and precludes sanguine predictions about their graduation.

When all these findings are taken together, we begin to glimpse what dropout and truant youngsters require of their schools: structure, intimacy, flexibility, a curriculum which helps them to understand the world and their own lives, skills, and continuity toward the diploma.

Therefore, the emergence of short term programs like the Outreach and Literacy Centers raises concerns. Our findings and the repeated statements of Outreach Center administrators suggest that students with extremely erratic attendance patterns and intense needs for responsive, reliable, non-threatening human relationships will find difficulty transferring from a short term program to a school. Even more effort would be required for these students to respond to the complex, sometimes competing, demands of two or more simultaneously attended, but separately administered, programs. Programs must be seamlessly integrated into schools or equivalency diploma centers so that the underlying path to the completion of high school and the diploma is clear and obtainable.

These learnings are significant, but we cannot be certain, given the limited scope of this study, how broadly to apply them. Further

Research and continued innovation is necessary to answer the numerous questions raised by this investigation.

We have learned, for example, that students make significant gains in the short run in many alternative schools, and we expect subsequent research to confirm that these gains hold over time for many students. We are equally concerned to discover the number and the profile of students the alternative schools do not reach and why. There needs to be more focus on older students whose other life responsibilities impinge on their school performance. In particular, we need to know whether the performance of older students with few credits improves substantially as they grow more conscious of the shortness of time they have to get a diploma, or the contrary.

Above all, we have become conscious of the need to answer questions about alternative schools in the context of the growing number of other available options for at-risk youth. The implications of the various interventions must be studied and made explicit; some will be more or less on target than others; all will need to be woven into the fabric of services for this population.

While the answers to the questions which we have just raised will enable us to improve the effectiveness of services offered to at-risk youth, enough has been clarified and documented both by this study and studies by the Board of Education to proceed with planning and experimentation. The pervasiveness and depth of the problem suggests that the school system as a whole, not merely the High School Division, should concentrate aggressively on systematic efforts to activate current knowledge.

The recommendations which follow offer first steps in that direction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- I. The school system should undertake to enhance and support the functioning of the existing alternative schools.
 - A. The Board of Education should fill the glaring gaps in financial and administrative support for the alternative schools. Specifically:
 1. The alternative schools should receive their share of federal vocational education and career education monies so that they may establish job preparation programs which include, where appropriate, on-site vocational classes. In order to make funds available that normally go only to larger programs, the Office of Career Education should establish as a priority improving vocational and occupational training in the alternative schools and should work with the schools to develop Vocational Education Act proposals. It should also endorse and encourage efforts by the schools to obtain outside assistance from business in providing jobs and job training.
 2. The Other Than Personal Services (OTPS) budget for most schools is decidedly inadequate, however, the per capita nature of the allocation places small schools at a particular disadvantage. A floor should be set on the OTPS allocation to cover the minimum fixed costs of operating schools -- telephone, photocopier, etc. -- while maintaining the essential per capita nature of the allocation. Such a formula would result in a modest but necessary budget increase.
 3. The Board of Education should provide the necessary resources to renovate and adapt the sites it assigns to the alternative schools. In the case of Redirection, the Division of School Buildings should undertake the renovation budgeted for High School Redirection for the year 1981-82 but never begun.

4. Immediate resolution should be found for administrative and programmatic problems in buildings currently occupied by more than one school program. Long range solutions should take into account the educational goals of differing programs when planning shared use of facilities.
- B. The alternative schools should be helped and expected to perform consistently at the level of excellence which characterizes their best efforts.
1. The faculties and leadership of the various alternative schools should be encouraged to meet periodically in carefully constructed professional conferences or other forums to renew their commitment and share their expertise. Those schools, for example, that have successfully focused their academic mission and student population could help others clarify their program and administration.
 2. With the assistance recommended above (Recommendations A.1 and B.1), the alternative schools should be expected and encouraged to increase their efforts to provide vocational programs, extra-curricular activities and enriched curricula in specialty areas.
 3. The Board of Education should work with the State to develop appropriate registration standards for these and similar schools which, unlike the present standard requiring 90% retention, would take account of their focus on students with exceptionally low patterns of prior attendance.
- II. Further study both by the Board of Education and by independent agencies is necessary to clarify the degree to which the various preventive and alternative programs for truants and dropouts succeed.
- A. A longitudinal study should be conducted to verify whether the gains made by students in their first semester in the alternative schools are sustained over time. This analysis, supplemented by case studies, would determine the percentage

and profiles of students who eventually graduate and those who drop out.

- B. The complex of programs, including the alternative schools, which were established to serve dropouts should be studied to determine the degree to which each meets the needs of a special student population and the possibilities of reaching more students more effectively by better coordination of their program efforts. It is especially important to target for study the programmatic options for very high risk older students with few credits and poor skills.
- C. Studies should be undertaken to evaluate efforts in large high schools to increase holding power for all students.

III. The school system should incorporate the learnings from the alternative school experience into a more integrated strategy for improving holding power in schools serving adolescents.

- A. The Board of Education should provide incentives to traditional schools which will encourage their efforts to clarify, organize and strengthen their instruction programs and methods and improve relationships between students and teachers. Several schools should be specifically assisted to diversify teachers' roles by allowing faculty more managerial participation and wider involvement in student support services and to activate students' roles by providing more opportunities for decision making, success, participation, and "learning through doing."
- B. The Board of Education should develop a flexible policy regarding school size rather than one which insists on the consolidation of schools with declining enrollment. Because declining enrollment is a temporary phenomena, it would be unwise to close a substantial number of schools; furthermore, decline presents an opportunity to develop more small, special focus schools found to be so appropriate for high risk students.

- C. Short-term programs, such as the Outreach Centers and the Literacy Centers, should be integrated into diploma-granting schools and equivalency programs. It is particularly critical to locate literacy programs for 14-16 year old students in schools to avoid unnecessarily isolating students and lowering teachers' expectations. Developing the required expertise and sensitivity in school-based literacy teachers will require considerable on-site technical assistance.
- D. High school superintendents should develop borough-wide master plans in cooperation with the Division of High Schools, the Office of Career Education and community members to expand and coordinate offerings to students, especially the most high risk youngsters. An analysis of student needs and school resources (as well as the findings of future studies) should be utilized in this planning process.
- E. In view of the evidence that the alternative high school experience may be too late for many students to ensure graduation, the school system should develop and institute applications of alternative approaches for junior high school students. Though promotion gates programs in junior high schools attempt to do this and are a valuable contribution to programming, unless the schools into which these programs are integrated can respond to adolescents' developmental needs, the programs will be unnecessarily restrictive.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Student Population Data

The tables and discussions which follow summarize the data from all eight schools on students' sex, age, attendance, disciplinary records, academic history, and standardized test scores.

Demographic Data (Table A)

Sex. The alternative schools as a group serve approximately equal numbers of males and females. However, three schools have more than twice as many females as males (Satellite, Middle College and Pacific) and two schools have the opposite pattern, with twice as many males (Bronx Regional and West Side).

Age. The schools serve students from 14 to 20, but not all age groups are equally served by every school. Redirection and Pacific serve the older students, with almost one quarter of their new entrants over 18. Middle College has the lowest average age because it admits only 15 and 16 year olds.

Attendance (Table B)

On the basis of information in the students' records, each student was categorized as a transfer, a truant or a dropout. Transfers were students who regularly attended another high school or junior high. Truants were enrolled students whose absences numbered more than 30 per semester, and dropouts were those who had quit school altogether.

The three case study schools and four of the five other schools admitted truants and dropouts as well as transfers. These seven schools clearly enroll many students who were failing in the conventional high schools. The one exception, Middle College, admitted only transfer students. Middle College's goal is to identify students who are likely to fail in conventional high schools, enroll them before they fail and prevent their failure. Consequently, they recruit and admit only students who have transferred from ninth grade.

There are clear differences between the case study schools in their entrants' attendance records. At City-As-School, the majority of new entrants are transfers, while at Redirection and Satellite the entrants are chiefly truants and dropouts. Redirection differs from Satellite in having more long-term dropouts and truants.

Among the other schools, Bronx Regional and Pacific seem most like Redirection since a large proportion of the new entrants were dropouts. Additionally, at Pacific, the dropouts and truants had been so for a comparatively long time. Park East seems most comparable to City-As-School, since both have a large percentage of transfers and relatively few dropouts. West Side does not seem to match any of the case study schools very well. While it has approximately half transfer students, like City-As-School, it also has one third dropouts, like Redirection. Middle College clearly is also a unique case.

Disciplinary Procedures (Table C)

All but one of the alternative high schools serve at least a few students who had been suspended or have histories of other serious disciplinary actions. However, in most schools, these new entrants are in a small minority. Among the case study schools, Redirection stands out as the one with the greatest percentage of students who had been in serious trouble. At Redirection, approximately one in six students had records of serious disciplinary actions. At City-As-School, no entrants had disciplinary actions on their records, and at Satellite only three percent had been suspended.

Among the other schools, Bronx Regional, with one quarter of the entrants having been suspended and one third with other disciplinary actions on their records, has the largest proportion of students who have been in serious trouble. Pacific looks similar to Redirection, and so does West Side. Middle College and Park East, with their low percentage of disciplinary problems, seem most like Satellite on this measure.

Academic History (Tables D and E)

Overall High School Experience

As Table D shows, two of the case study schools have entrants who had already earned from three to four semesters of high school

credit. With respect to this measure, these two case study schools are quite different from the other alternative high schools. At those, students averaged only one to two semesters of high school credit.

The case study schools also differ from the other schools in the diversity among entrants in number of earned credits. At City-As-School, one entrant came with no credits, while another had already earned 44 credits. Both Redirection and Satellite have some entrants with no credits, and some with close to 30 credits. The only other schools with such a wide spread among the entrants are Pacific and West Side. In the three remaining schools (Bronx Regional, Middle College and Park East) the range of earned credits is narrow, with no student having more than 18 credits. In fact, at Middle College, the group of entrants is the most homogeneous with all students having between four and 14 credits.

Table D also shows that the case study schools differ from most of the other schools in the average number of semesters their entrants were enrolled in high school before coming to the alternative school. In the case study schools students, on the average, had been at another high school for two to three years (four to six semesters). Moreover, entrants vary considerably in the amount of high school experience they had, some students having zero or one semester and others with eight or nine semesters. The only other school with similarly experienced entrants is Pacific.

At Bronx Regional, Middle College and Park East, students generally had one to one and a half years in high school and very few had been enrolled for more than two years. Again, Middle College entrants were extremely homogeneous -- all but one transferred after completing ninth grade at a junior high school.

West Side is also a special case. There, ten of the 46 entrants sampled, or 22 percent, came directly from eighth grade, consequently they all had no semesters of experience in high school. The other entrants averaged one and one half years in high school and varied widely around this mean, two students with only one semester, and one with nine semesters of prior high school experience.

To provide a common metric for students and schools that varied so widely in number of credits earned and number of prior semesters in high school, each student's rate of credit accumulation was computed by dividing the number of credits by the number of semesters. This simple division yields the average number of credits earned each semester. The standard rate of progress is 5.0 credits per semester since one is expected to take four years to earn the 40 credits required for the high school diploma.

At all of the case study schools, students previously earned credits at a lower than average rate. At City-As-School with an average of 3.8, students were slightly more than one credit below the standard; at Satellite, with a 2.8 average, they were slightly more than two credits below; and at Redirection, with a 1.35 average, they were earning credits at only one fourth of the standard rate.

The other alternative high schools also vary in entrants' average rate of credit accumulation. At Middle College students averaged 4.9 credits per semester, very close to the standard of 5.0. At both Park East and West Side (excluding entrants from eighth grade) students had a rate similar to Satellite entrants. At Bronx Regional and Pacific, students had very low rates of credit accumulation, though they are not quite as low as Redirection.

Most Recent Year in High School

In addition to looking at the student's overall high school career, the student's last year in school prior to enrolling in an alternative high school was studied. As Table E shows, the case study schools are very different from each other. At City-As-School, students averaged three credits each semester, two credits less than the standard rate of five. At Satellite, students earned credits at less than half the expected rate, averaging only 2.15 credits each semester, and at Redirection, students averaged 0.79 credits per semester, less than one fifth of the expected rate.

All case study schools admitted some students who had not earned any credits during their previous year in high school, but they varied considerably in the proportion of students in this group: at City-As-School, nine percent of the entrants had not earned any credits

the previous year, at Satellite, 21 percent and at Redirection, 50 percent.

Among the other schools, Middle College stands out as having students who had a successful year. All of the entrants had earned at least some high school credits their previous year. Bronx Regional and Pacific seem comparable to Redirection, although their students earned slightly more credits than those at Redirection. When considering the previous school year, Park East's entrants look similar to those at Satellite. At West Side, students who had attended high school previously seem similar to the students at City-As-School. However, the large number of eighth grade transfers at West Side makes this school quite different from City-As-School.

Standardized Test Scores (Table F)

Test scores from the students' records were used as an indication of the academic skills of the new entrants. One school, Park East, had not posted test scores on the records at the time of our visit. At the other schools, scores were generally from either the October or April 1980 administration of the PSEN, the one exception being Middle College where approximately half of the available scores were from the April 1981 PSEN. No school had test scores for all sampled students, though Satellite came close with 97 percent having scores. Scores for approximately 30 percent of the sample were missing for Redirection, Bronx Regional and Pacific, 41 percent were missing for City-As-School, and 55 percent were missing for Middle College. Whenever data is missing, the question must be raised whether the results are due to differences in what was available rather than to real differences between groups. We have asked the staff of the schools to read our conclusions, and to comment on their accuracy, but there remains the possibility that the schools would look very different if all data were available.

In addition to the median test score at each school, we also looked at differences between the median score and the expected score. The comparison was made because schools varied in the amount of students' prior high school experience. To get the expected score, the average number of credits earned was divided by ten because students are expected

to earn ten credits each year. Then this division resulted in the average number of high school years completed and was added to a base of 9.0. The difference was computed by subtracting the expected score from the median score. This expected score is therefore based on students' mastery of high school credits rather than merely counting the amount of time spent in high school and therefore is a better representation of what we might expect of these students. For example, one would expect a student who had spent three years in high school but had earned only enough credits to be in the ninth grade, to have a ninth grade reading level rather than an eleventh grade level.

Reading

Table F shows that the case study schools illustrate the range of skills found in the alternative high schools. At City-As-School, students are reading very well with a median grade equivalent score of 11.0, scoring above the expected. Moreover, only one of the entrants scored below 8.0 in reading, 74 percent scored above 10.0. At Satellite, the median range score was 9.1, and since these students had earned 1.5 years of high school credit they are almost 1.5 years below their expected score. Students scored the lowest at Redirection, averaging 6.5, more than three years below their expected score.

Among the other schools Pacific looks much like Redirection, with the lowest average score more than three years below the expected score. Middle College is similar to Satellite in that their students are reading one year below expected. At Bronx Regional, students are scoring even lower, two years below expected. At West Side, students with some high school experience are similar to those at Middle College and Satellite. In contrast, West Side's eighth grade transfers are scoring almost on grade level.

Math

Findings from analyses of math scores generally complement those reported for reading. City-As-School had the highest math scores, with a median grade equivalent of 10.1. At Satellite, students averaged 8.7, again approximately two years below their expected score, and at Redirection with an average more than four years below the expected score. When the schools are ranked in terms of the difference between

actual and expected scores, the order is the same for math and reading: City-As-School, Middle College, Satellite, West Side, Bronx Regional, Redirection and Pacific.

Conclusions

The New York City alternative high schools serve students who, for the most part, have not been successful in conventional high schools when success is measured by earning an average of five credits a semester. The one exception is Middle College, which tries to prevent failure among a group of potential dropouts and recruits them before they fail.

The alternative schools serve students who in the conventional high schools have been chronic truants or dropouts. However, the percentage of dropouts and truants in the entering class varies widely among the alternative schools. All but one of the alternative schools enroll students who have been suspended from conventional high schools or who have other serious disciplinary actions on their record. For most of the schools though, these students are a very small minority, except at Bronx Regional where they make up more than one quarter of the entrants.

City-As-School stands out among the alternative schools as the only one where students generally are reading at or above grade level. At four of the schools (Satellite, Bronx Regional, Middle College, West Side) students average one to two years below grade level, and at Redirection and Pacific students score more than three years below their expected score.

In summary, when the entrants at each of the alternative high schools are systematically studied, we find that each school is unique in the student population it serves. The alternative high schools are not replications of the same model, but each recruits and attracts a distinct population. The schools that were selected as case studies provide insight into the similarities and differences among all of the alternative schools. They are not representative, but rather illustrative, of the options available to students through the alternative school system.

TABLE A

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA FOR FALL ENTRANTS
IN THE NEW YORK CITY ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOLS

	<u>Percentage of</u>		<u>Average</u> Age	<u>Percentage</u> 19 Years or Older
	<u>Female</u> Students	<u>Male</u> Students		
Case Study Schools:				
City-As-School (n's=93,89) *	56%	44%	16.9	4%
Redirection (n's=48,46)	44%	56%	17.5	24%
Satellite Academy (n's=29,29)	68%	32%	16.3	7%
Others:				
Bronx Regional (n's=18,17)	33%	67%	16.4	0%
Middle College (n's=38,38)	66%	34%	15.4	0%
Pacific (n's=26,26)	73%	27%	17.5	23%
Park East (n's=34,33)	44%	56%	15.9	0%
West Side (n's=46,45)	35%	65%	16.3	4%

*The first "n" refers to the number of students for whom we had gender information. The second "n" refers to the number of students for whom we had age data.

TABLE B

ATTENDANCE HISTORIES OF FALL 1981 ENTRANTS
IN THE NEW YORK CITY ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOLS

	<u>Admission Status*</u>			Average Semesters as Truant or Dropout	Absence Rate for Last Year in School days/semester
	Dropouts	Truants	Transfers		
Case Study Schools:					
City-As-School (n's=82,39,68)	17%	29%	54%	1.8	25.7
Redirection (n's=46,40,44)	33%	54%	13%	2.4	42.9
Satellite Academy (n's=26,16,27)	15%	50%	35%	2.2	24.6
Others:					
Bronx Regional (n's=13,12,17)	38%	54%	7%	1.8	27.9
Middle College (n's=36,-,38)	0%	0%	100%	-	10.6
Pacific (n's=21,14,22)	24%	43%	33%	3.4	32.7
Park East (n's=34,10,21)	11%	25%	64%	2.0	33.9
West Side (n's=46,24,41)	32%	20%	48%	2.3	35.2

TABLE C

HISTORIES OF SUSPENSION OR DISCIPLINARY ACTION

	Percentage of Students with Suspension on High School Records	Percentage of Students with Other Disciplinary Actions on High School Records
Case Study Schools:		
City-As-School (n=93)	0%	0%
Redirection (n=48)	19%	8%
Satellite Academy (n=29)	3%	0%
Others:		
Bronx Regional (n=18)	25%	33%
Middle College (n=38)	8%	3%
Pacific (n=26)	15%	15%
Park East (n=34)	0%	3%
West Side (n=46)	6%	20%

TABLE D

ENTRANTS' ACCOMPLISHMENTS PRIOR TO ADMISSION:
 NUMBER OF HIGH SCHOOL CREDITS¹, NUMBER OF SEMESTERS ENROLLED
 IN HIGH SCHOOL, AND RATE OF CREDIT ACCUMULATED

	Number of Credits		Number of Semesters	Rate of Credit Accumulation
Case Study Schools:				
City-As-School (n's=92,90,89)	$\bar{x}$ 19.9 Range 0-44		5.2 1-9	3.8 0.0-6.7
Redirection (n's=48,47,47)	$\bar{x}$ 7.1 Range 0-24		4.5 0-9	1.3 0.0-4.8
Satellite Academy (n's=29,28,28)	$\bar{x}$ 15.1 Range 0-29		5.5 2-9	2.8 0.0-5.2
Others:				
Bronx Regional (n's=17,17,17)	$\bar{x}$ 5.2 Range 0-18		2.9 1-7	1.6 0.0-4.0
Middle College (n's=38,38,38)	$\bar{x}$ 9.8 Range 4-14		2.0 2	4.9 2.0-10.0
Pacific (n's=26,26,26)	$\bar{x}$ 10.9 Range 0-29.5		5.0 1-8	2.1 0.0-5.0
Park East (n's=29,29,29)	$\bar{x}$ 6.6 Range 0-16		2.4 1-6	3.0 0.0-8.0
West Side ¹ (n's=36,35,35)	$\bar{x}$ 10.1 Range 0-27		3.6 0-9	2.9 0.0-6.0

¹Does not include 8th grade transfers.

TABLE E

STUDENTS' ACCOMPLISHMENTS PRIOR TO ADMISSION:
AVERAGE NUMBER OF CREDITS EARNED EACH SEMESTER OF THE
MOST RECENT YEAR ENROLLED IN HIGH SCHOOL AND PROPORTION
OF ENTRANTS EARNING NO CREDITS THEIR LAST YEAR

	Number of Credits	Proportion With 0 Credits
Case Study Schools:		
City-As-School (n=92)	3.1	9%
Redirection (n=48)	0.8	50%
Satellite (n=29)	2.2	21%
Others:		
Bronx Regional (n=17)	1.0	35%
Middle College (n=38)	4.8	0%
Pacific (n=26)	1.6	35%
Park East (n=29)	2.2	28%
West Side ¹ (n=36)	2.4	11%

¹Does not include 8th grade transfers.

TABLE F

STUDENTS' GRADE EQUIVALENT SCORES IN
READING AND MATHEMATICS AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN
MEDIAN AND EXPECTED SCORES

	READING			MATH		
	Observed	Expected	Difference	Observed	Expected	Difference
Case Study Schools:						
City-As-School (n's=55,55)	Median 11.9 Range 5.0-13.6	11.0	+0.9	Median 10.1 Range 6.0-13.6	11.0	-0.9
Redirection (n's=34,34)	Median 6.5 Range 3.4-10.5	9.7	-3.2	6.4 4.0-11.6	9.7	-3.4
Satellite (n's=28,27)	Median 9.1 Range 6.2-12.9	10.5	-1.4	8.7 5.8-12.9	10.5	-1.8
Others:						
Bronx Regional (n's=13,13)	Median 7.7 Range 5.3-9.6	9.5	-1.8	6.5 4.8-8.2	9.5	-3.0
Middle College (n's=17,11)	Median 8.9 Range 6.1-12.9	10.0	-1.1	9.0 6.7-12.5	10.0	-1.0
Pacific (n's=18,18)	Median 6.9 Range 5.1-12.9	10.1	-3.2	5.8 4.0-12.9	10.1	-4.3
Park East (n's=NA)	Median (not available) Range	9.7	(not avail.)	(not available) Range	9.7	(not available)
West Side 8th Graders (n's=9,-)	Median 8.5 Range 4.2-10.8	9.0	-0.5	(not available) Range	9.0	(not available)
Others (n's=22,16)	Median 8.5 Range 5.9-12.9	10.0	-1.5	7.5 5.8-12.2	10.0	-2.5

Appendix B: Research Instruments

The following instruments were used:

Instrument 1: Student Data Collection Sheet - to collect data from the permanent and current records of incoming students in each of the nine alternative schools.

Instrument 2: Student Interview - to interview a sample of students in three case study schools.

Instrument 3: Staff Interview - to interview staff in three case study schools.

1. Student Data Collection Sheet

Student #: _____

School: _____

Date Admitted: _____

Date of Collection: _____

1. General Information:

a. Ethnicity: _____ b. Age: _____ c. Sex: _____

2. Admission Status:

a. Transfer: _____ Dropout: _____ (If dropout, how long -
out of school?)
Semesters: _____

Transfer because of or in lieu
suspension: _____

b. Referral by school or agency: _____
Self-referral (by peers or family): _____
Referral by Hearing Officer: _____

3. Educational History Prior to Admission to Alternative School:

a. Last standardized test in Reading:

Test: _____ Date: _____ Score: _____

b. Last standardized test in Math:

Test: _____ Date: _____ Score: _____

c. Entrance Reading Test:

Test: _____ Date: _____ Score: _____

d. Entrance Math Test:

Test: _____ Date: _____ Score: _____

e. Total number of high school credits accumulated
before admission: _____

f. Number of high school credits accumulated in last two semesters
of attendance in former high school: _____

g. Number of courses attempted and not passed in last two semesters
of attendance in former high school: _____

h. Total number of absences in last two semesters of attendance
former high school: _____

i. Total number of semesters in high school prior to admission
to alternative school: _____

j. Were these semesters continuous? _____

Or was there a break in attendance between them? _____

(Student Data Collection Sheet)

- k. Did this student attend 9th grade in a high school? _____
or junior school school? _____
- l. Number of high school (or junior high school 9th year)
suspensions: _____
- m. Was there any other history of serious disruptive behavior
in school? _____
If so what? _____

4. Achievement in Alternative School:

- a. Current standardized test in Reading:
Test: _____ Date: _____ Score: _____
- b. Current standardized test in Math:
Test: _____ Date: _____ Score: _____
- c. Post-test in Reading:
Test: _____ Date: _____ Score: _____
- d. Post-test in Math:
Test: _____ Date: _____ Score: _____
- e. Credits accumulated: _____
- f. Number of courses attempted and not passed: _____
- g. Total number of absences: _____
- h. Number of incidents of disruptive behavior and how it
was handled: _____

5. Student Status:

- a. Still attending: _____
- b. Discharged: _____
Date: _____
Reason: _____

2. Student Interview

Student#: _____

School: _____

Date: _____

1. How did you find out about this school? What made you decide to come?
What were you hoping to get?
2. Can you briefly tell me about your high school career before coming to
this school?

What was the first school you attended? Was it in the 9th grade?
What was it like? Did you learn and pass in your courses?
Did you attend regularly?
3. What makes this a good school for you? What do you like most about the
the school? What are getting here? What's keeping you here?
4. Do you feel comfortable about coming to school? What is the atmosphere
like here?
5. Describe how teachers and students relate to each other.
What are teachers' attitudes about your class work?
What happens when you have a problem with school work?
What kind of work do you get? What are you learning here?
6. What is the most important difference to you between this school and
your old school?
7. What does this school need to do to improve?
8. What do you plan to do when you finish school? How does going to this
school fit in with your plans? What are you learning here?
9. How would describe this school to a student who was thinking of coming
here? What kind of students can be successful here?

3. Staff Interview

Name: _____

Position: _____

Date: _____

School: _____

1. What makes this a good school?
2. What is the school's biggest problem?
3. What does the school need to improve?
4. Tell me about the organizational structure and processes in the school, specifically:
 - a. What are the principal's strong and weak points as a leader?
 - b. Is there an instructional leader?
 - c. How are decisions made?
 - d. How is staff development conducted?
5. Tell me how this school feels to you. What is the climate like?
6. How and over what matters do students and teachers relate to each other?
7. What are the instructional objectives of this school? How do these objectives influence your course preparation? What other objectives influence your course preparation? How do you determine if you have met your objectives? How important are basic skills in the schools or in your instructional program?
8. What are the non-instructional (i.e. personal or social) objectives of this school? How are they encouraged? How do you measure success?
9. What is the school preparing students for after graduation?
10. How does this school benefit you (personally and professionally)? Is this school better for you than a conventional high school? Why? Are you worried about burn-out? Is there a way to prevent it?
11. Who are the students the school is most successful with? Why? Who are the students the school is not reaching? Why? Are you able to help students who drop out make the transition to their next step in life, e.g. employment, GED, etc.?
12. What parts of your program could the conventional high schools use?
13. How has this school changed over the last several years? What precipitated these changes? (More stringent requirements for the diploma, Regents attendance requirements, fiscal retrenchment, MBO and other accountability measures, etc.) What do you think of these changes?
14. What new pressures do you see in the future?
15. What would you like to see the school become? If you were given a significant amount of money to improve the school, how would you spend it?

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